

ITALIA! GUIDE & THE SOUTH 2016

# ROME

ROME

PROPERTY HOLIDAYS FOOD WINE CULTURE PEOPLE

## YOUR GUIDE TO ROME & BEYOND

What to see and do, the best places to stay and eat  
& where to visit throughout Lazio and the south

132  
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I first went to Rome as a student (we're going back a rather long time now, I'm afraid). Myself and my girlfriend (now wife of 22 years!) were staying with family friends and it was a revelation to be shown around the city by people who lived there. We 'did' all of the touristy

things. I tossed a coin into the Trevi Fountain. We went to the Vatican, the Colosseum and we ate *pizza bianca* – though it was even more interesting to experience Rome's culture through the eyes of locals... Driving around the city at rush hour; night time meets in backstreet squares; sipping on water direct from miniature fountains; having conversations with people who were fiercely proud to be Roman.

Rome is a wonderful city, and this *Italia! Guide to Rome & the South of Italy* celebrates that city, Lazio and beyond. If you've planned a trip to Rome and the south of Italy then this guide will help you make the most of your time. It will help you find places to stay, places to eat and, of course, things to see and do. Indeed, after *Rome in Pictures* we kick start your tour of the city with Fleur Kinson's excellent feature on the *Top 20 Things* you just have to do when you visit Rome. Turn to page 16 and indulge!

Paul Pettengale

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

► On all our restaurant reviews the following symbols indicate the price range of dishes per person:

up to €25 (Great grub on a budget)

€26-€50 (Delicious delights but a little heftier on the wallet)

more than €50 (Gourmet dining for a really big night out)







# ROME & LAZIO

Plan and enjoy your perfect break in the Eternal City with our comprehensive guide, including holiday ideas, expert advice and much, much more...







# Rome IN PICTURES

You could live in Rome a lifetime and not see all it has to offer. This magazine can only serve as an appetizer, so let us begin to tell the story with pictures rather than words...

*The Sant'Angelo Bridge was built by the Emperor Hadrian to connect the city to his mausoleum (in the background) and was originally known as the Pons Aetius, the Bridge of Hadrian, only taking its current name after the mausoleum took its current name, the Castel Sant'Angelo, which happened after the Archangel Gabriel appeared here in 590 AD.*

Café culture is an essential part of the Roman experience and even the most intensive itinerary should include at least some time just taking in the atmosphere of the city. Like the picture on the top right of this spread, this scene takes place in Trastevere, historically a working class neighbourhood that has recently become very trendy.



*Right: Evening falls in Trastevere; a bottle of wine upon a set table entices would-be diners to an al fresco meal, while an oh-so-Italian original Fiat 500 stands parked (apparently illegally) in front of the baker's on the other side of the square. And everyone seems so nonchalant about the beauty of it all... Below: In terms of motorized icons, the two-wheeled equivalent of the Fiat 500 is the Vespa – the Vespa was always popular, but it really achieved iconic status after Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck took to the streets of Rome on one in the classic movie Roman Holiday.*





*They say that if you want to cross the road safely in Rome you don't look for a zebra crossing (they are there for adornment only) or some traffic lights (their rubric is far too complex for any mere tourist to comprehend) – rather you find a nun, and stay as close to her as you can. No car, no scooter, will ever dare to obstruct a nun going about her holy business.*

*This, if we boil it all down to its very essence, is what it's really all about: St Peter's Square, the public space in front of St Peter's Basilica (upon which the viewer is perched) in the Vatican City, the heart of the Roman Catholic Church.*





*The Campo Verano, or Cimitero Verano, was established as a cemetery in the Napoleonic era but its history as a burial place is much, much longer than that. There were early Christian catacombs in this area, which is situated outside the Aurelian walls and takes its name from an Ancient Roman family who owned the land here.*

Right: The Villa Sciarra sits between the neighbourhoods of Trastevere, Gianicolo and Monteverde Vecchio. It was built for a Cardinal in the 17th century, acquired by the Colonna di Sciarra in 1811, and became a public park when Henrietta Wurts bequeathed it to Benito Mussolini on that proviso in 1932. Below: Feral pigeons gather by a drinking fountain at the foot of the Palatine Hill. People complain about them, but they have been here as long as anybody, and have been a feature of our cities since long before Rome was founded...







## TOP TWENTY THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN

# Rome

Italy's capital is so full of treasures, you could spend years here and not manage to see them all. So what hope is there for the short-term visitor? Don't panic, help is at hand. **Fleur Kinson** distils the great city into its most unmissable sights...

**F**or 500 years, Rome was the mighty centre of the Western world. Now it's merely the capital of Italy, but remains a confident, magnetic city that pulses with irresistible energy. Twelve million visitors are wowed by the place each year, delighting in its peerless art and architecture, its glorious food and shopping, and the inimitable style and verve of its native residents. Few cities offer quite so many riches at once.

Chockfull of relics from nearly 3,000 years of continuous habitation, it's tempting to conclude that there's just too much to see in the Eternal City. Rome wasn't built in a day, and nor can it be seen in one. Or ten. Or twenty. But it helps to have some ideas on where to start, so here's a brimming handful of recommendations. Just be sure to keep your eyes open for all the little things that aren't on any list, and be ready simply to soak up the special atmosphere of the place. Rome might be a city of grand, impressive monuments, but it's also a city of nuances and atmosphere. For all its historical pomp and frenetic busyness, it's surprisingly unpretentious and relaxed. Try to go with the flow. If you can't see everything, so what? In a city such as this, no one ever really can.

### 1 THE COLOSSEUM

The hulking Colosseum is Rome's undisputed icon, and like the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Parthenon in Athens, you've simply got to lay your eyes on it while you're here. For 2,000 years the gigantic structure has been plundered for building materials, damaged by fires, shaken by earthquakes and crumbled by the vibrations of modern traffic, but there's still an awful lot left and it remains an awe-inspiring chunk of architecture. Originally able to accommodate a whopping 70,000 spectators, the Colosseum is still the design model for all subsequent stadiums around the world. The ancients gleefully practised a carnival of torture and slaughter here. Gladiators, slaves, Christians, wild animals – all battled to a gory death in this grand arena. If you want to explore inside, you can best avoid the queues and crowds in the evening or early morning.

## 2 THE TREVI FOUNTAIN

Exuberant, ridiculous, and not to be missed, the famed Trevi Fountain is a rococo riot of giddy sea gods and wild-eyed horses frisking in tumbling green water – all tacked onto the back of a Renaissance palace from which statues look on in mild astonishment. It might be crowded and maybe even a little tacky (the Baroque style is never terribly far from the absurd), but there's a genuine joyousness to this roaring, ebullient tableau of sea-themed statuary and it's almost impossible not to regard it with a grin. In the right mood, it's even beautiful. Of course you've got to join in with the silly-but-fun tradition of tossing in a coin or three. Throw over your left shoulder with your right hand. One coin ensures you'll return to Rome, two that you'll fall in love with a Roman, and three that you'll marry them. Ha!



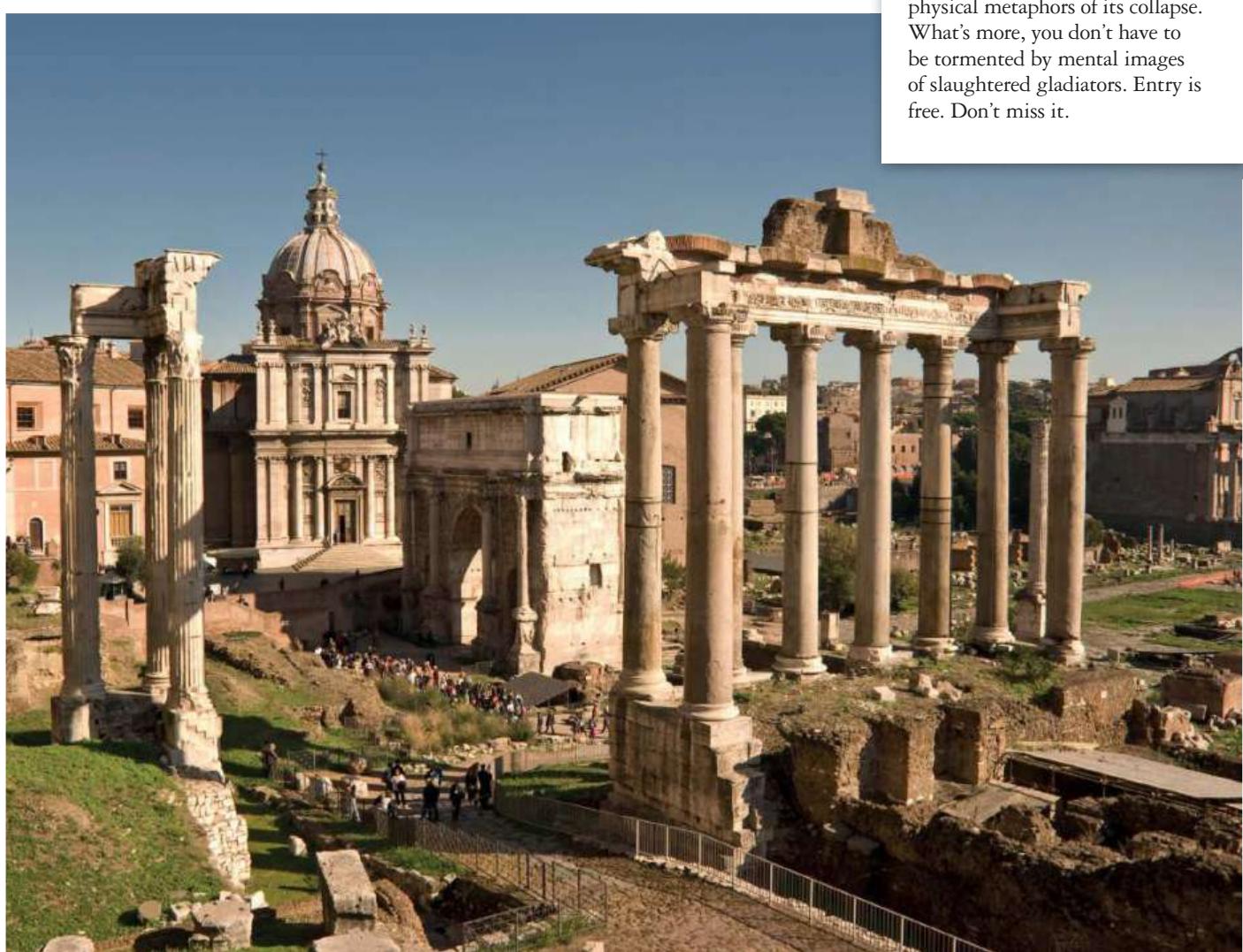
### 3 IL CENTRO STORICO

Paradoxically, Rome's 'historic centre' isn't its most historic centre. The current *centro storico* wasn't the ancient city centre and only became the heart of Rome in Renaissance times. Regardless, this is likely to be the area that beguiles and fascinates you more than any other part of the Eternal City. This is Rome at its most colourful and theatrical. Tiny tangled streets and alleys open onto diminutive piazzas stuffed with churches and flamboyant fountains. Pedestrians vie for space with Vespas and street vendors. Romans swan about being their sparkling selves. It's a wonderful place. Aimless ambling is a must. Wander at will, soak in the atmosphere. Be sure to return for an evening stroll, too, when the nightlife ramps up and the area grows especially lively and full of fun.



### 4 THE ROMAN FORUM

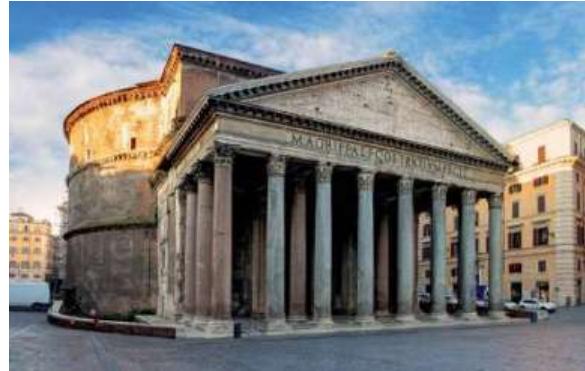
This sprawling wilderness of crumbling columns and tumbled temples is one of the most hauntingly unforgettable sets of ruins anywhere in the world. Desolate, beautiful, poignant, fascinating – the Roman Forum is all of these things. In pre-Imperial Rome, it was the site of major political and religious institutions as well as shops, market stalls, public meeting spaces and so on. It was essentially Rome's first city centre, and retains some of the gravitas that that suggests. Undeservedly, the Roman Forum isn't quite as magnetic to tourists as the nearby Colosseum. For this writer at least, it's a far more atmospheric place, where you can sense the presence of the workaday ancient city and vividly behold physical metaphors of its collapse. What's more, you don't have to be tormented by mental images of slaughtered gladiators. Entry is free. Don't miss it.





## 5 THE PANTHEON

This 2,000-year old temple to all the gods is one the best-preserved relics of the ancient city and, together with the Colosseum, is one of Rome's most impressive buildings. It's a marvel of architectural engineering. The temple's diameter is precisely equivalent to its height (43 metres), and no visible vaults or arches hold up its vast dome (they're sunk into the concrete walls). Meanwhile, a 9-metre hole in the dome's centre lets in a dramatic shaft of daylight – dancing with dust motes – that slowly inches round the interior space as the day progresses. The building was once lavishly decorated with stucco, statues and bronze, but much was re-appropriated by builders in succeeding centuries. The bronze portico roof, for example, was famously stripped and melted down to provide the metal for the huge *baldacchino* in St Peter's Basilica.



## 6 PIAZZA NAVONA

Rome's most famous square and arguably the heart of the modern-day city, this spacious pedestrianized oval must be passed through at least once. It evolved from a 1st-century athletics stadium, hence the shape, but today its most energetic goings-on generally consist of cappuccino-slurping, wine-sipping, dinner-chomping, shopping, strolling, people-watching, chatting, flirting, street artistry and busking. It's an extremely vibrant place at night, so be sure to swing by here then too. Lined with handsome buildings, including a church with a Borromini façade, the piazza is graced by some wonderfully fanciful fountains. Legendary sculptor Bernini (arch-rival of Borromini) had a hand in their design. Water gushes down over Neptune, nymphs, sea monsters, dolphins and other lively statuary. It's cooling to stand in their gentle spray on a hot summer day. There's an Egyptian obelisk in the piazza too, adding additional exotic fun.

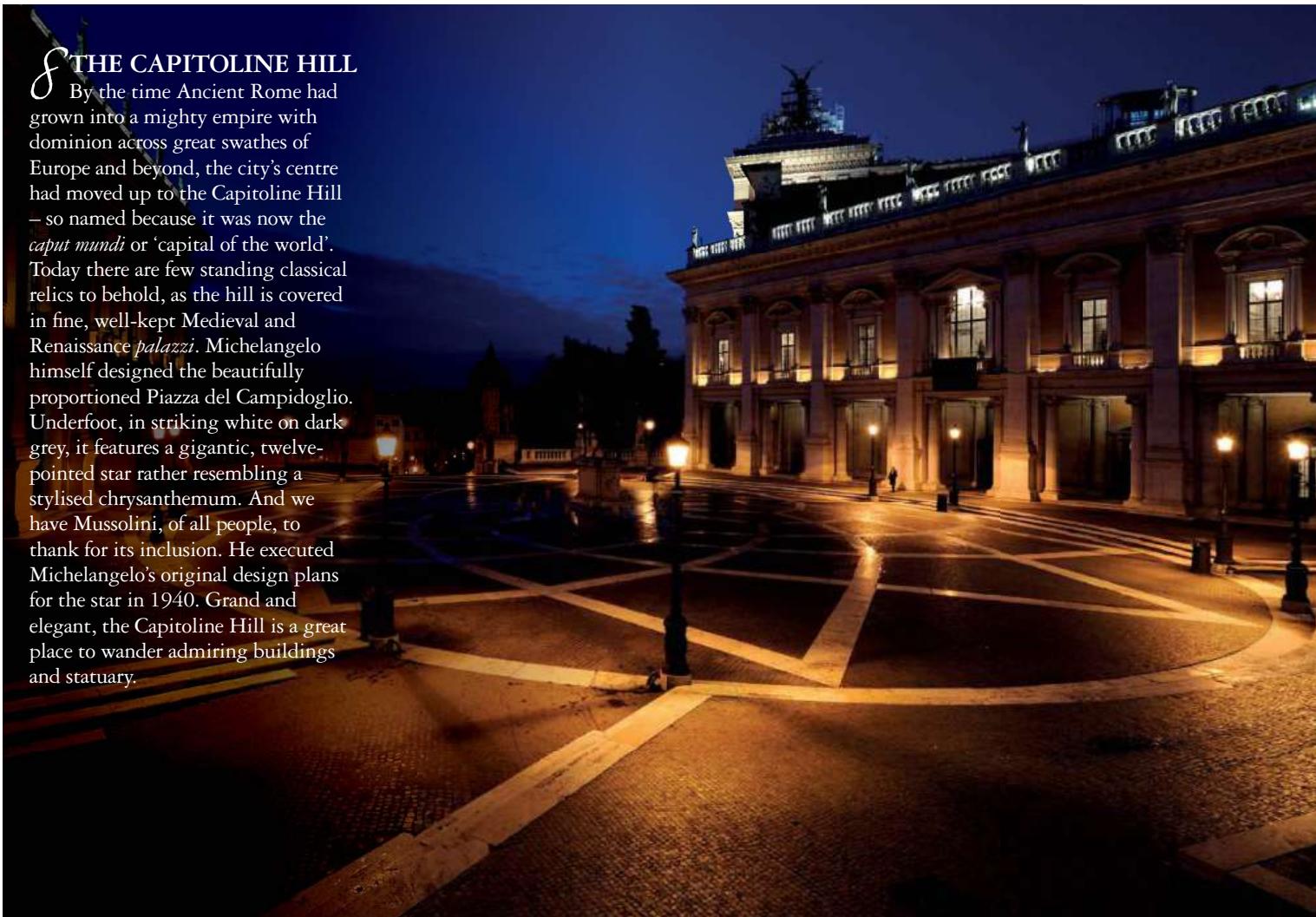


## 7 SHOPPING

Lovers of fine clothes will enjoy a salivating gawp in the windows of Armani, Gucci, Prada *et al* on the sleek Via Condotti at the bottom of the Spanish Steps. But they should also explore the pretty side streets round here. Via Maria de' Fiori and Via Bocca di Leone are especially good for one-off, unfamous boutiques. On the other side of town, the Via del Governo Vecchio is festooned with elegant clothing shops. Meanwhile, for quirky and original items, trawl the hip Monti district – especially its weekend 'urban market'. The Prati neighbourhood is particularly good for sumptuous food-shopping, and the Tridente area is great for just about everything else. Rome now has its fair share of dull, cut-price outlet malls on the city periphery, but for truly stimulating shopping in picturesque streets you should stick close to the *centro storico*.

## 8 THE CAPITOLINE HILL

By the time Ancient Rome had grown into a mighty empire with dominion across great swathes of Europe and beyond, the city's centre had moved up to the Capitoline Hill – so named because it was now the *caput mundi* or 'capital of the world'. Today there are few standing classical relics to behold, as the hill is covered in fine, well-kept Medieval and Renaissance *palazzi*. Michelangelo himself designed the beautifully proportioned Piazza del Campidoglio. Underfoot, in striking white on dark grey, it features a gigantic, twelve-pointed star rather resembling a stylised chrysanthemum. And we have Mussolini, of all people, to thank for its inclusion. He executed Michelangelo's original design plans for the star in 1940. Grand and elegant, the Capitoline Hill is a great place to wander admiring buildings and statuary.





## 10 CAPITOLINE MUSEUMS

Much of Rome's best ancient sculpture is to be found in the Capitoline Museums, which occupy two *palazzi* on the Piazza del Campidoglio. Opened to the public in 1734, this is considered the world's first museum. Relics include the famous (and slightly tacky) bronze she-wolf – grinningly suckling Romulus and Remus from oversized udders – that serves as a symbol of the city. There are busts of Roman emperors, paintings by Caravaggio, and a great deal more. While up on the Capitoline Hill, be sure also to visit the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli. Built on an ancient temple to Jupiter on the very highest point of the hill, it's quite a climb to reach the place, but well worth it. The austere exterior cedes to a glorious, celestial interior. Look out for some lovely frescoes and fascinating curios.



## 9 TRASTEVERE

Take a break from the tourist scrum in central Rome and wander this calmer, characterful district to the southwest. Separated by the river from the rest of the city, Trastevere developed its own identity for many centuries, and still maintains a unique dialect. In Classical times it was Rome's artisan quarter; then for hundreds of years it was a melting pot for immigrant communities. A working-class stronghold until very recently, it's now very trendy and alternative, full of great bars and restaurants and wonderfully lively in the evening. Its charming narrow streets and tight little squares are great to wander. Many visitors feel that Trastevere offers them a glimpse of 'real Romans' going about the business of real life, far from the tourist magnets elsewhere in the city. Be sure to pop into the majestic church of Santa Maria in Trastevere while you're there.

## 11 THE SPANISH STEPS

You run the risk of being underwhelmed, but you're kind of obliged to go and see the Spanish Steps when you're in Rome. This broad stone staircase flanked by balustrades and flowers is indeed majestically constructed, but you might be disappointed to find the steps entirely hidden beneath seated tourists and street vendors, depending on the time you visit. Evening is often best, when the crowds have thinned and only foreign aesthetes haunt the site. In less populous centuries, Balzac, Byron, Keats and Shelley all trod these stairs for inspiration, so keep your mind on that while sidestepping the teenagers with backpacks. The steps are only called 'Spanish', by the way, because the lead down to the Spanish Embassy. Do not fail to climb to the top and drink in the sumptuous views of the city from up there.



## 12 VATICAN CITY

Encompassing about a hundred acres and home to around a thousand people, the Vatican is the world's smallest country. Of course, 'country' is pushing it, and put here for fun. 'City-state' is the more accurate term. Established only in 1929, Vatican City is a bijou enclave within Rome, backed by high walls and fronted by a glorious, colonnaded piazza. But it's often hard to know when exactly you've left Rome behind and entered Vatican City. Once you're in, there's novelty aplenty. The Vatican has its own postal service, daily newspaper and radio station – like a toytown from childhood. It also has the colourful Swiss Guards to look after security. You mustn't miss St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums (see next page). And you might even want to catch the Pope. If he's in town, he addresses crowds on Wednesday mornings and at noon on Sundays.





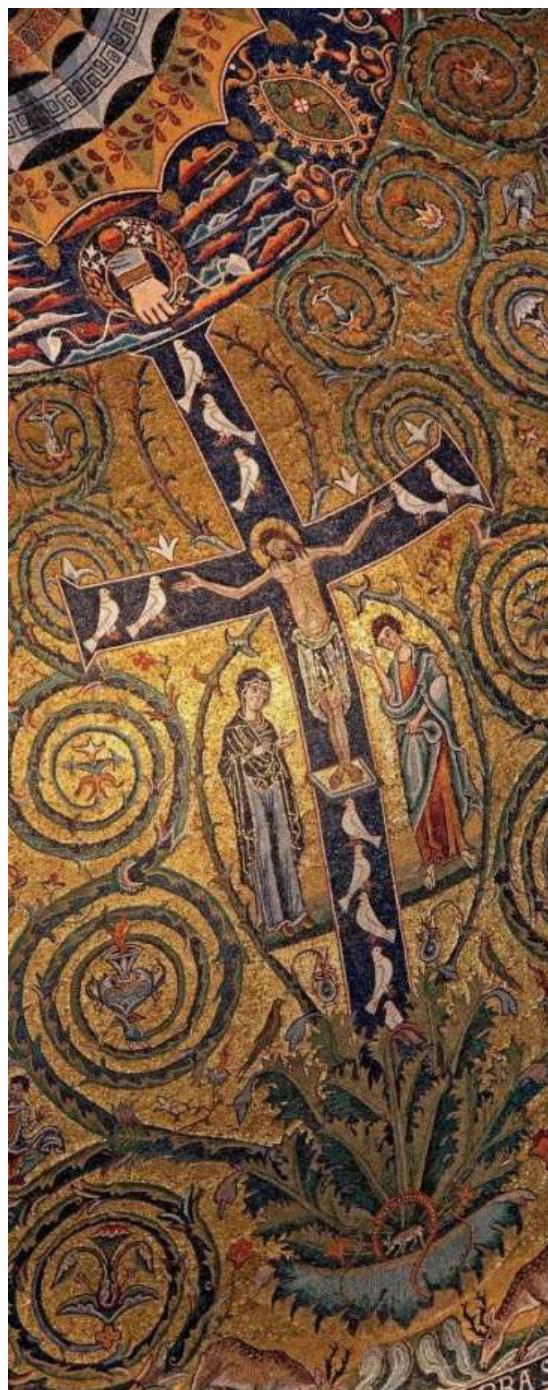
## 14 BASILICA OF SAN CLEMENTE

Lying just a few streets southeast of the Colosseum, this outwardly unassuming-looking old church provides a wonderful physical metaphor for continuity in the long history of the Eternal City. It is a conglomeration of three vertical layers – three buildings with an unbroken lineage. On its lowest level, reachable down dark steps, the basilica is built upon a musty old temple from the 2nd century, surrounded by the old rooms of an ancient Roman house. On its next level, it sits on a 4th-century church. On the next level, ground level, the basilica is a 12th-century construction boasting mosaics and frescoes. Thus basilica sits upon church upon temple and house, linking nearly 2,000 years of history physically together. Descending to the various levels feels like travelling back in time. Then you ascend up and out into the modern world.



## 13 ST PETER'S AND THE VATICAN MUSEUMS

Apart from Bernini's magnificent piazza and arguably the Pope himself, the two most unmissable sights in Vatican City are St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums. Built on the site of St Peter's tomb, the Basilica is so staggering in its size that your sense of scale and perspective begins to falter when you're inside. 'If those are people standing next to that column, why are they only as big as ants?', etc. The Vatican Museums, meanwhile, are similarly mind-boggling in scope, and you'll need to pace yourself if you visit. As the plural name suggests, there's a wide range of important collections here. Classical statuary, Renaissance paintings, Etruscan and Egyptian relics. Most beloved are the Raphael Rooms and, of course, the Sistine Chapel. Book ahead if you want to see the latter.





## 15 THE PALATINE HILL

Rising high above the Roman Forum, the Palatine is the most central of Ancient Rome's seven hills and is thought to be where the city began. (Romulus and Remus were supposedly found in a cave here before being handed over to the mythical she-wolf for suckling.) Certainly there has been human habitation on this hill for 3,000 years. In the days of the Roman Republic, this was the most fashionable place to live, and as the wealthy constructed their lavish homes up here, the hill's name gave rise to our word 'palace' and its cognates in other languages. Today it's like an open-air museum, crowned with mighty ancient ruins and little else. There's a restful atmosphere to the place, and you might even fancy reclining with a picnic.

## 16 VILLA BORGHESE

Central Rome's largest open space, this fine collection of public parks and gardens was originally the private grounds of the 17th-century Villa Borghese. Today it's the perfect place to take a breather from the city's tireless bustle. Woods, lawns, flower gardens and a lake stretch over a surprisingly large area, and there are innumerable attractive nooks to relax, sunbathe, picnic, meditate, and plan your next assault on the tourist sites. Cineastes might like to know that the Casa del Cinema project has turned a derelict pavilion in the gardens into a state-of-the-art cinema, focussing on classic films. There are various special presentations and events at which you can mingle with actors, directors and producers. The Villa Borghese gardens also yield a fine crop of museums...





## 18 JANICULUM (GIANICOLO) HILL

This tall hill rising between Trastevere and the Vatican technically doesn't count as one of the famed 'Seven Hills' of Ancient Rome because it lies beyond the confines of the old city. However, it makes up for that lack of venerable distinction by offering one of the very best panoramic views of the Italian capital. Domes and spires and pinnacles and rooftops stretch majestically before you, and all you can hear is the distant hum of traffic and the whisper of wind in the pine trees. In addition to marvellous views, the Gianicolo has interesting statuary marking heroes of Italy's 19th-century unification. There's an especially large equestrian statue of Garibaldi. If you're on the hill at noon, brace yourself to hear a single cannon shot. Since 1847, this has signalled the exact time to surrounding belltowers.

## 17 GALLERIA BORGHESE

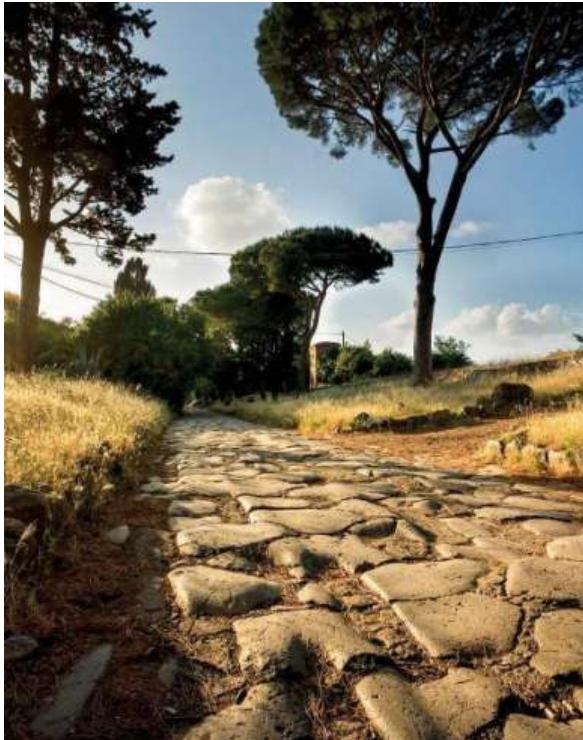
Housed in the stately old Villa Borghese, this refreshingly compact museum is a bijou treasurehouse of painting and sculpture. Raphael, Caravaggio and Bernini are just some of the big names on offer. Perhaps most unforgettable is Bernini's graceful and dramatic *Apollo and Daphne* sculpture. Life-sized and in gleaming white marble, it depicts the moment Daphne transforms into a laurel tree as she chastely flees the amorous clutches of the god – her fingers turning into leaves and twigs, her lower limbs stiffening into a bark-covered trunk. Disturbing but beautiful. There's ancient Roman sculpture in the villa's collection too. Do note that you must reserve tickets in advance to visit the Galleria Borghese, and that tickets give you a precise entry and exit time. It's inconvenient, but worth it to see the collection.





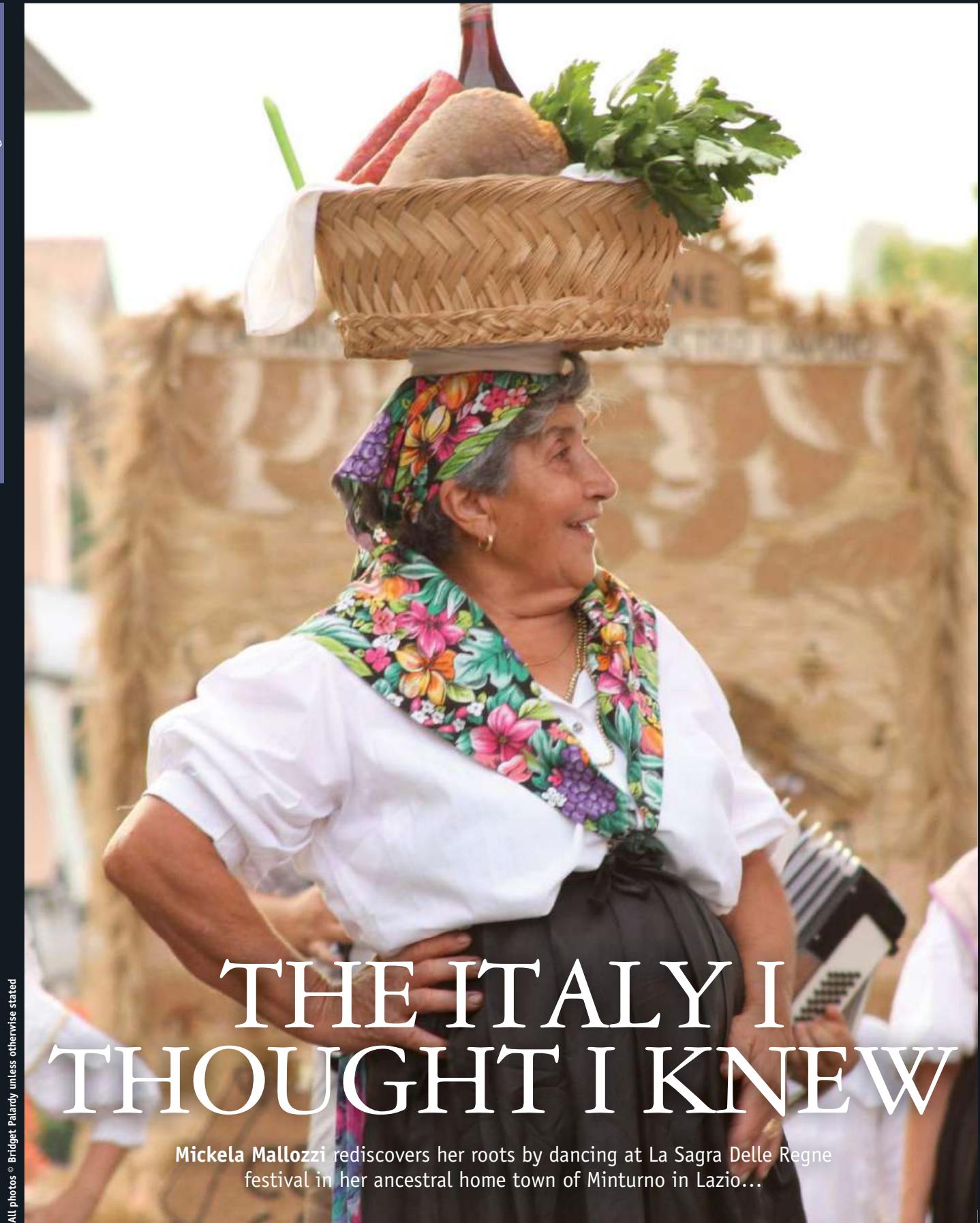
## 19 THE 'VITTORIANO'

Beside an otherwise uninteresting and busy traffic junction, the Vittorio Emanuele monument rises in a blinding white edifice of self-important stone. Famously likened to a typewriter or a wedding cake, it looks nothing like either. Beautiful it might not be, but audaciously gigantic it certainly is. It was built in the late 1800s as an 'Altar of the Nation' to mark Italian unification. And it's fun to climb up and down its various steps and terraces, admiring the excellent views of Rome it affords. There's abundant statuary to admire as you clamber about. Various figures personify Italy's regions and surrounding seas, while the horse-riding figure of Vittorio Emanuele II himself is one of the largest statues in the world. Vaguely pompous from a distance, the monument reveals itself to be much more impressive up close.



## 20 THE APPIAN WAY

The ancient Appian Way (*Via Appia Antica*) provides an atmospheric, fresh-air escape from central Rome. You'll need to take a bus from the city centre to reach it, but when you do, you have the chance to stroll the giant cobblestones of one of the earliest and most strategically important roads of the early Roman Republic. Thirteen centuries old, the original Via Appia weaved out of southern Rome towards Brindisi in faraway Puglia (the high heel of Italy's boot). It was on this road that Spartacus's army was executed. Today it's prettily flanked by secretive cypress trees and dreaming parasol pines, and punctuated with ancient monuments that each hold a story of their own. Bring comfortable shoes and drinking water. And come in the daytime rather than at night, when the road can sometimes take on an unsavoury aspect.



# THE ITALY I THOUGHT I KNEW

Mickela Mallozzi rediscovers her roots by dancing at La Sagra Delle Regne festival in her ancestral home town of Minturno in Lazio...



## "I WAS NOT JUST EMBARKING ON A PLANE TO VISIT MY 80-YEAR-OLD NONNA PINA – THAT DAY WAS TRULY THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF MY LIFE"

**S**aying goodbye to my parents at the security checkpoint of New York's JFK airport with a sudden outburst of sobs was more than out of the ordinary for me. The emotion overcame my entire body, and without warning, I was in tears, looking back at blurred silhouettes of my mother and father.

What was going on? By that point I was already a seasoned traveller, jumping on flights on a regular basis, and never was I lucky enough to have someone send me off on my travels like today. I have two passports, and I am savvy enough to know that the only way to fly is with one carry on, a backpack, and a folded Longchamp bag in my suitcase to fill with souvenirs for my flight back home. I should have been ecstatic – I was on my way for yet another summer adventure in southern Italy, staying at my grandmother's farmhouse in the village of Minturno; ready to hit the beaches, eat as much *mozzarella di bufala* as possible, and maybe hit a *discoteca* or two. But today was different – I had one

checked suitcase, a carry-on full of recording gear, and more pairs of shoes packed than I usually wear in three months. I was not just embarking on a plane to visit my 80-year-old Nonna Pina – that day was truly the first day of the rest of my life, and I will never forget it.

### MOMENT OF CLARITY

I am a first-generation Italian-American, growing up with both parents from the small town of Minturno (in the province of Latina, Regione Lazio), one of many tiny specs on the Italian map that most people have never heard of. And most tourists may never be lucky enough to find this place either. My roots are deeply seeded in this part of the world, and not since recently did I realise how strong physically my connection to this land really was.

Back in January 2010, I had an epiphany. I was a full-time dance teacher in New York City, getting gigs left and right, dancing to the point of exhaustion and also injury. I had always loved to dance, and when the recession of 2008 hit

America, instead of keeping my comfortable corporate job in the music industry, I quit and became a freelance dance instructor. Maybe not the smartest move at the time, but at least I was happy. Again, epiphany in January 2010. This crazy idea to begin a TV series based on my two biggest passions in life exploded in my mind – I was going to travel the world, experiencing each culture through its folk music and dance. I was practically doing that anyway – whenever I would travel to exotic places (which was once a year), I would find cultural celebrations and holidays and immerse myself in the moment by joining in on the dances that the locals would be doing. It didn't matter that I could not speak the language – that was the best part, I was making friends, sharing laughable moments, and connecting with people on a completely basic level that could have never been possible without ➤

*Clockwise from opposite: a local Minturnese woman walking in La Sagra Delle Regne's afternoon procession; Giovanni Malagisi, an original wheat thrasher; small children celebrating in the festivities; Mickela dressed in traditional costume; Mickela dancing*



© Mickela Mallozzi

## WHERE TO EAT

### ► CASEIFICIO

*Via Per Tufo, 5 – Minturno*

Most residents of Minturno normally either cook at home or eat out in the neighbouring coastal city of Gaeta, which is where you will find the majority of the restaurants. However, you can find fresh bread, *mozzarella di bufala*, *antipasti*, and *salumi* here at this bakery – great for packing a picnic basket for the beach.

### ► IL MOLO GELATERIA

*Piazza del Pesce, 1 – Gaeta*

Nine miles southwest of Minturno. Known for having the best *gelato* in town, including a variety from *bufala* milk! Small *gelato* is €1.60.

### ► IL NOSTROMO

*Lungomare Giovanni Caboto, 154*

*Gaeta*

☏ +39 0771 470 107

Great for families and groups, as well as couples – fantastic *linguine vongole* (caught straight from the Mediterranean Sea down the road). Dinner for two plus wine is around €40-€50.



“THE BRIGHT, BLUE COASTAL WATERS GLEAMING THROUGH THE BEND IN THE LAND, TAUNTING YOU WITH ITS BEAUTY DURING SUNSET. THIS WAS MY ITALY”

*Clockwise from top left: Mickela and her film crew approaching the Church of St Francis; a local Minturnese; a man and his grandson take part in La Sagra Delle Regne's procession; a local Minturnese dressed in medieval costume; one of the many festivities held during the week leading up to La Sagra Delle Regne*

► the element of dance to bring us together. Those magic moments are addictive, and that feeling is exactly what sparked my idea for what is now my career.

### FULFILLING A DREAM

I started Bare Feet that next day, and without any question or doubt in my mind, I knew where I needed to begin first. I thought to myself, ‘how can I go and explore the world’s music and dance cultures without knowing my own first?’ That was it, that is when I realised

I had to make my journey back to the mother country and delve into the folk traditions of a place that all of my ancestors called home. Once a year, Minturno holds its largest celebration, La Sagra Delle Regne (the Wheat Festival), which is held the second Sunday in July. This was my chance to start my Bare Feet

adventure, and I was more than ready to make it happen.

I hired three friends of mine from New York to help me with my endeavour; that included two videographers and a sound person, and we all four lived with my grandmother for one week in her tiny farmhouse. A farmhouse which was built by my great-grandparents – a *cantina* that is always stocked with freshly-crushed olive oil, greener than anything you have ever seen; a staircase that was once an exterior feature to the house which was then covered in the 1960s to protect it from the natural elements; fig trees, olive trees, orange trees, lemon trees, and a massive rosemary bush in close proximity; the most beautiful panoramic view of a mountain range directly staring back at you from the bedroom window, with its pleasant valley reminding you of its breadth; the bright, blue coastal waters gleaming through the bend in the land, taunting you with its beauty during sunset. This was my Italy, and this was the most special place in the world to me. And in that week, I

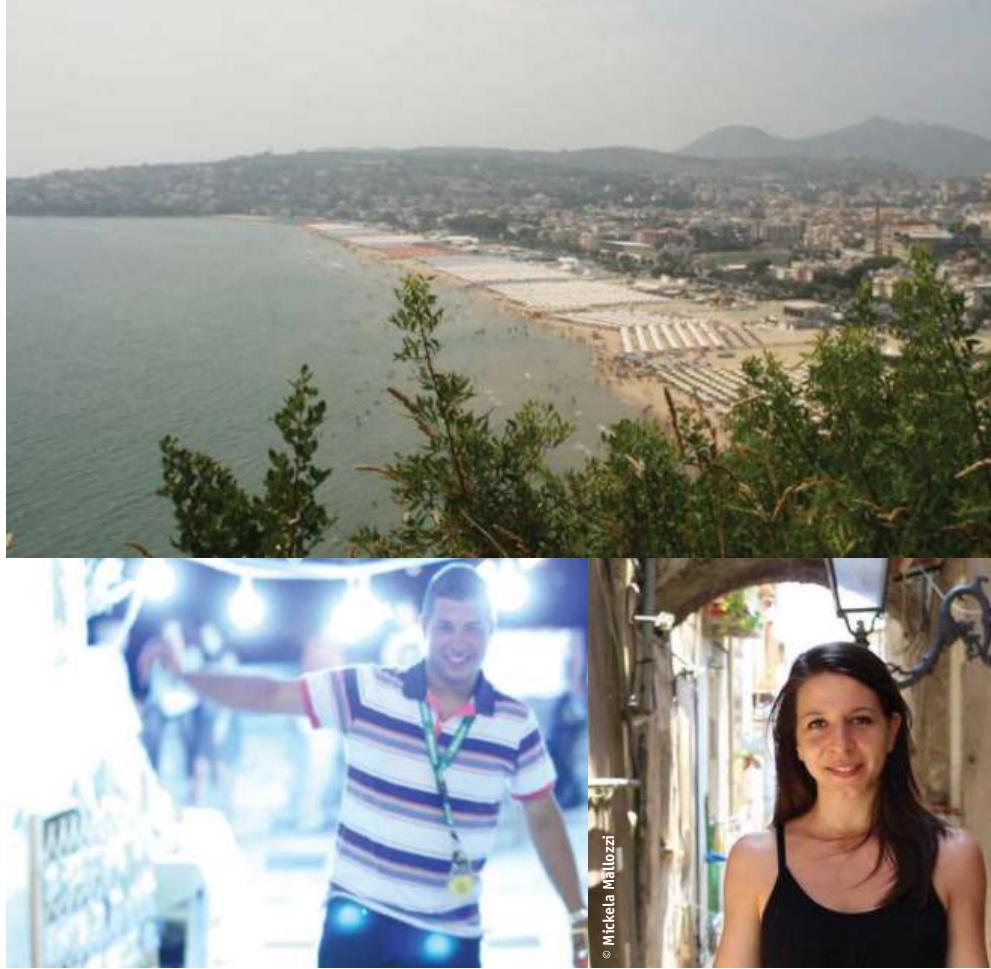
became a true Minturnese during the most celebrated time of the year.

La Sagra Delle Regne, like almost all Roman Catholic traditions, started as a pagan ritual during the wheat harvest season to give thanks to the gods for the bountiful crop. It eventually converted under the church’s influence, and in 1701, when the Franciscan monks returned to Minturno after having been banished by Napoleon, they started the popular folkloristic feast that we now know today as La Sagra Delle Regne. Not only is the feast in veneration of the patron saint of Minturno, Virgine Santissima Delle Grazie (The Madonna of the Graces), but the wheat is still the focal point of the entire celebration.

The festival includes a number of smaller celebrations held the entire week leading up to the holy Sunday in July. As Minturno was a historically significant city during the 14th and 15th centuries, medieval flag throwers and re-enactments of the royal families that once lived in the castle of Minturno fill the streets and main piazza in the







## "I GAVE MYSELF IN TO ITS HISTORY AND FOLKLORE AND PEOPLE WHO CHERISH AND MAINTAIN ITS TRADITIONS"

**Clockwise from top left:** Serapo Beach in Gaeta; Mickela in a hidden street of Minturno; A member of *I Giullari* and her daughter dressed in the traditional costume of Minturno; a young dancer

► town. Jousting competitions and court jesters share their skills with the thousands of onlookers while the *bancarelle* (stalls) feed the empty bellies with mouthwatering *porchetta* and sweet *torrone*. This was just the tip of the iceberg – my true mission at the festival was not just to see

the magic of the entire week, but become a member of Minturno's oldest folkloric dance group, *I Giullari*.

And I did. My week consisted of countless rehearsals with the dance group, building a sense of camaraderie with its members that still lasts to this day. That is what made me feel closer to these people – I was given the opportunity as *l'Americana* to come

and let my body feel the movements that I was born to do. I danced on stage in front of the thousands of Minturnesi during *La Sagra Delle Regne*, feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment that can never be reproduced. I was part of the community, and not only because I happen to have the same last name as most of the other families there, but because I gave myself in to Minturno, to its history and folklore, and wonderful people who cherish and maintain its traditions.

### HEADING HOME

As I drove my blonde-haired, blue-eyed American production crew back to Fiumicino airport that following Tuesday morning, I remember hearing from my videographer, "Mickela, I've seen Italy before, but I've never seen *this* Italy. Thank you." R



### WHAT TO SEE AND DO

#### ► CASTELLO DI MINTURNO

*Piazza Portanova, Minturno*

The medieval castle holds a museum in the main entrance, showcasing artifacts and history of Minturno folklore. The most noted guest ever to have stayed at the castle is Saint Thomas Aquinas.

#### ► CHIESA PARROCCHIALE DI SAN PIETRO APOSTOLO

*Piazza San Pietro, Minturno*

Walk from the main piazza to the *centro storico* and the Church of St Peter will appear at you out of nowhere. Summertime midweek almost guarantees a wedding, so keep an eye out for the bride and groom exiting the 11th-century church with streamers and *confetti* all around!

#### ► LA MONTAGNA SPACCATA

*Via Ss. Trinita, Gaeta*

Located right by the beaches ten miles west of Minturno, La Montagna Spaccata is filled with legend and folklore – and a chapel wedged between the two rocks is also a sight to see.

#### ► BEACHES AND NIGHTLIFE

Head to Scauri, Gaeta, or Sperlonga for some of the most beautiful beaches. Afternoon sunbathing is best in Serapo, the main beach in Gaeta. On Saturday nights, the lidos in Sperlonga turn into open-air discos and nightclubs, and the party goes on until sunrise.

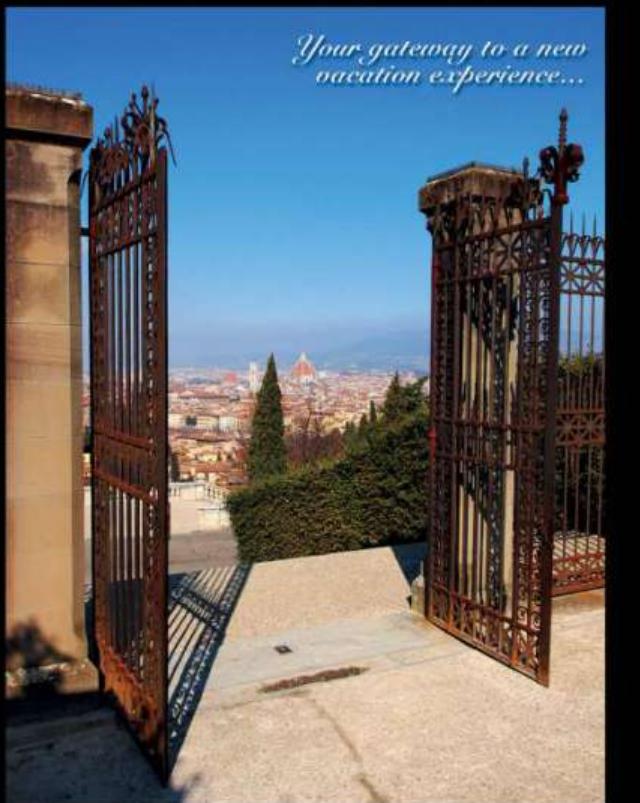
### FIND OUT MORE

#### ► To watch the Bare Feet Web

Series in Minturno, Italy, go to [www.travelbarefeet.com](http://www.travelbarefeet.com) and catch all six episodes of Mickela's adventure. If you're inspired to experience Italy the same way, check out the Bare Feet Tours happening now in Puglia, Italy (in partnership with Walks of Italy) – see [www.travelbarefeet.com](http://www.travelbarefeet.com) for more.

### GETTING THERE

► The closest airport to Minturno is Rome Fiumicino (FCO), and Minturno is easily accessible by train (Minturno-Scauri train stop – go to [www.trenitalia.it](http://www.trenitalia.it) for schedule and prices). For more information on Minturno and the surrounding area, go to [www.minturnoscauri.it](http://www.minturnoscauri.it)



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[info@scolasticatours.com](mailto:info@scolasticatours.com)

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Robert Adams from Santa Barbara

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*Via di Porta San Sebastiano, Rome. Price on request*

4 BEDROOMS • 4 BATHROOMS • 3 FLOORS • LIVING AREA 350m<sup>2</sup> / 3767 Sq Ft • LAND AREA 30000m<sup>2</sup> / 322917 Sq Ft



**I**n the heart of the Ancient Appian Way park, close to the historic centre of Rome, in a beautiful park bordering the Aurelian Walls, we would like to present this prestigious villa – perfectly restored with precious materials.

The real estate property is characterised by a large park of over 30,000 square metres, well-maintained and adorned with flowers and various species of trees. The entrance, through two security gates, leads to an area designated for parking and to a garage.

The villa is set on three floors and has a

beautiful porch. The first floor comprises entrance hall with guest bathroom and utility room, large living room with windows that overlook the park and the pool, large dining room and kitchen area. On the second level we have the bedroom area which includes three bedrooms and two bathrooms (one with shower and one with bath); large closets in one of the three bedrooms, and a closet in the hallway.

On the basement level there is a service area with kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, a cellar, two storage rooms, laundry room and a large walk-in closet.

Possibility of installing an internal lift. Air conditioning, alarm system, automatic irrigation, swimming pool with jacuzzi, two automatic gates.

The quality of the finishes and the classic style of the interior characterise the property as an ideal main residence as well as a second home close to the centre of Rome.

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*Clockwise from top left:* Presepi on sale at Piazza Navona; Christmas at Vertecchi; festive visitors at Piazza Navona market; Castromi panettone; sun-drenched tables outside Caffè della Pace; Hannah with the produce on display in a tiny bar in Testaccio; street artists above the Spanish Steps; chocolates in the window at Giolitti; tree at Piazza del Popolo





48 HOURS IN...

# Festive Rome

A visit to the Italian capital in December finds the streets alive with lights and celebration, as **Hannah Bellis** finds out. She also tests if it is cheaper than a UK shopping spree...

**S**tanding at the top of the Spanish Steps, bathed in the golden Italian sunlight, I can see bustling Via dei Condotti opening out in the shade below me as a vibrant backdrop to Bernini's Barcaccia sinking boat statue. Standing alongside me, street artists offer caricatures to tourists; painters sell their canvases above me, where they get to enjoy the view as well as the sun that eludes the designer shops below when the grand alleyways and tall shops cast them in shadow. This is a common scene for anyone visiting Rome, but this is the first time I have seen the artists in thick coats and hats, and the streets draped with grand, illuminated chandeliers made of fairy lights. It's December, and I am finally testing my theory that surely it must be more economical, and certainly more enjoyable, to do my Christmas shopping on a weekend in Rome rather than braving the UK high street. It's a good idea, in theory, and I am certainly looking forward to putting it into practice. If I stick to the designer boutiques of Via dei Condotti for all my gifts, it certainly won't be cheaper, though, so after buying just a couple here, as well as a few paintings from the artists above, and stopping to admire the Barcaccia without its throng of summer tourists, it's time for a refreshment break. ➤

Photography © Hannah Bellis



## MUST VISIT SHOPS

### ► GIOLITTI 1

Via Uffici del Vicario, 40

✉ +39 06 699 1243

[www.giolitti.it](http://www.giolitti.it)

This ice cream shop also sells a vast number of cakes, biscuits and sweet treats by weight, all elegantly wrapped to paper trays to make artisan gifts. You need to order by weight, *un etto* is 100g, *due etti* is 200g, etc.

### ► CASTRONI 2

Via Frattina, 79

✉ +39 06 699 21 903

[www.castroni.it](http://www.castroni.it)

There are no fewer than 11 branches of this fabulous Italian food emporium around Rome. This is the biggest, but see the website for full details of others. Each is a treasure trove of Italian foodstuffs, all pre-packed and perfect for planes and presents.

### ► IL PAPIRO 3

Via del Pantheon, 50

✉ +39 06 679 5597

[www.ilpapirofirenze.it](http://www.ilpapirofirenze.it)

The marbleized paper objects you can buy here are beautiful, and showcase hand-decorated paper at its very best. You'll also find Venetian glass objects, pens, pencils, inks and accessories. Il Papiro is a Florence-based chain of stores but there are two outlets in Rome, and the company now also has an outlet at Covent Garden, as well as shops in New York, Palm Beach and Melbourne.

### ► VERTECCHI 4

Via della Croce, 70

✉ +39 06 332 2821

[www.vertecchi.com](http://www.vertecchi.com)

There are four of these stationery stores across Rome, all still owned and operated by the Vertecchi family. As well as original stationery products made in Italy, they sell branded pens, party items, fine art supplies and in December a staggering display of Christmas merchandise.

### ► BARTOLUCCI 5

Via dei Pastini, 96-99

✉ +39 06 6919 0894

[www.bartolucci.com](http://www.bartolucci.com)

Bartolucci is a family-run company that specialises in wood-carving. Stop and browse through the artisan wooden toys and games made and sold here for a gift you won't find already in the toy box.

### ► LITTLE BIG TOWN 6

Via Cesare Battisti, 120

✉ +39 06 6992 4226

[www.littlebigtown.it](http://www.littlebigtown.it)

This giant toy shop is the biggest in Italy and covers four floors. Be prepared to queue in the later days of December.



Gourmet treasures lure you into Castroni

## DON'T MISS

### NEAPOLITAN PRESEPI IN ROME

Above the Forum, visit the Church of Saints Cosma and Damiano. Inside you'll find one of the largest nativity scenes in the country, originally commissioned by Charles II of Naples and bought by Rome in the 1930s. The scene shows the Neapolitan tradition of including people from everyday life alongside the Holy Family.

► One of my favourite things about Italy, regardless of the season, is the abundance of small independent stores and eateries that exist, survive and even thrive, alongside the big brands and names – I really hope this never changes. At Christmas, each of these small stores has its own special Christmas produce and display to offer. Even the lowest bar will sell a few choice Christmas titbits, displayed with pride alongside the napkin dispensers and Coke fridges. Presumably, this is so patrons can dispense with Christmas shopping altogether and pick up what they need along with their regular espresso – or most likely something stronger.

But it is the food emporiums of Rome where I intend the bulk of my purchasing. Fortunately, most of my friends and family appreciate gourmet food gifts just as much as I do, and by purchasing in Italy I can get them authentic Italian gifts that you often can't find in the UK. My first point of call is Pasticceria Giolitti, on Via Uffici del Vicario. It's a great place to buy ice cream as well as gifts to take home, with myriad cakes, pastries and chocolates to tempt you.

Essential vocab for buying by weight: *un etto* is 100g, and the plural is *etti*, if you are buying multiples of 100g. For pre-packed goods that you can pick up and pay for, try Castroni – there are 11 branches around the city and I could easily spend more than an hour in time, and much more in coin, in any one of them.

## STATIONERY STOP

Really good, stylish stationery makes a great gift for men and women. I am a bit of an addict – and I know I am not alone in this! Il Papiro in Rome is a great point of call for exquisite writing materials and hand-decorated paper objects – and staff so snooty I could practically be in London. They also sell lovely wax seals, leather goods, pens made with Venetian glass, as well as stunningly beautiful wrapping paper. Vertecchi, on Via della Croce, is a totally different kettle of fish. Here they offer some beautiful stationery, their *prodotto artigianale* themed around artists' sketches of Rome. At Christmas time the store turns itself into a winter wonderland, with piles upon piles of baubles, festive houses and decorations, and



Mercedes festive bunting on Via dei Condotti



Illuminated Piazza Navona



Roast chestnuts sweeten the air

much more besides – but still at a quality that means you may want to buy it!

As for Christmas merchandise you may not want to buy, there is plenty of that to be found at the festive market at Piazza Navona. But alongside the brightly-lit festive bling and cuddly toys, there are some exceptional artisan *presepe* figures on

which is charmingly traditional, but venture further afield to downtown Rome to explore Bartolucci, on Via dei Pastini, for hand-carved wooden toys without a hint of moulded plastic in sight. For its size alone, you are sure to find what you are looking for at Little Big Town, the largest toyshop in Italy with over four floors of toys and games on offer

*It is the food emporiums of Rome where I intend the bulk of my purchasing*

display here, as well as jewellery, scarves, gloves and other gifts. The market is open till 1am and really has to be seen to be believed – the carousel on site is still carrying children on it when I visit after 11pm. The place is abuzz and it's a real celebratory atmosphere. The children love it – but where to buy a gift for children that aren't there?

You are spoilt for choice by toy shops in Rome too, all with very different offerings to the usual suspect brands you see in the UK. Just off Piazza Navona you'll find Al Sogno,

– be prepared to queue in the run up to Christmas, something I am not accustomed to seeing the Italians do.

As well as on Via dei Condotti, where we began, you'll find other good shops to explore around Piazza del Popolo, which is a great square to stop for a coffee or a bite to eat too. There are designer stores here, as well as quality independent boutiques and leather goods stores that are perfect for window shopping – and won't break the bank if you see something you want to buy for somebody.

To maximise your Christmas

## DON'T MISS

**LAYERS OF RELIGION**  
Visit the Basilica of St Clement to see the two previous structures that were on the site, dating from the mid-4th century on the first level down and the 1st century on the second level down. The present day church is also richly decorated, with a stunning 12th century mosaic and some of the marble originally used in the early Christian basilica below. Entry costs €5. [www.basilicasanclemente.com](http://www.basilicasanclemente.com)

## WHERE TO STAY

### ► SCALINATA DI SPAGNI 7

Piazza Trinità dei Monti, 17

✉ +39 066 793 006

[www.hotelscalinata.com](http://www.hotelscalinata.com)

This great value hotel in a fantastic location near the Spanish Steps is great for families, as it can offer triple and quadruple rooms as well as a family suite, some of which have their own private balcony or courtyard. Prices for double rooms start at €110 per night, with family rooms available from €190.

### ► REGINA HOTEL BAGLIONI 8

Via Vittorio Veneto, 72

✉ +39 064 211 111

[www.baglionihotels.com](http://www.baglionihotels.com)

The area around Via Veneto is where the great and the good used to congregate in the glamorous 1930s, and that chic sophistication is reflected at the five-star Baglioni Hotel. With rooms and suites decorated in all manner of different styles from that era to the present day, all have a high quality finish with original furniture. Double rooms start from €285, junior suites from €600.

### ► PALAZZO MANFREDI 9

Via Labicana, 125

✉ +39 067 759 1380

[www.palazzomanfredi.com](http://www.palazzomanfredi.com)

This intimate five-star hotel is bang next door to the Colosseum and the views from some of the rooms and the dining room terrace are fantastic. The rooms are small but stylish and comfortable. This is my home away from home when I am spoiling myself on a visit to Rome, as I adore breakfasting overlooking the Colosseum. Double rooms are available from €320.

### ► HOTEL D'INGHILTERRA 10

Via Bocca di Leone, 14

✉ +39 066 99 811

[hoteldinghilterra.warwickhotels.com](http://hoteldinghilterra.warwickhotels.com)

Situated near to the shopping district of Via dei Condotti, the Hotel D'Inghilterra is an elegant institution set in a 17th century palazzo right in the centre of Rome and just a stroll away from the Spanish Steps. The décor is traditional with period furniture throughout. Double rooms start from €235.

### ► TREVI B&B ROMA 11

Via del Lavatore, 83

✉ +39 06 69380944

[www.bbtreviroma.com](http://www.bbtreviroma.com)

Nestled away near the Trevi fountain, this modern budget B&B is finished to a very high specification. The rooms are clean, comfortable and ensuite. It boasts internet access, multi-lingual staff and an airport transfer service. Double rooms are available from €89.

## WHERE TO EAT

## ► TRATTORIA OTELLO ALLA CONCORDIA 12

Via della Croce, 81

+39 66 791 178

[www.otello-allaconcordia.it](http://www.otello-allaconcordia.it)

Even though their menu is in English and Italian this is an authentic place full of Italians and they are not looking to rip you off. It offers a traditional Roman menu and you pay just €12 for a bottle of house wine. It is set off a lovely quiet courtyard, so tucked away from the bustle of the city. You need to exit the restaurant to find the toilets in the courtyard!

Price range € €

## ► CAFFÈ DELLA PACE 13

Via della Pace, 3-7

[www.cafedellapace.it](http://www.cafedellapace.it)

I love sitting outside this ivy-clad bar, whatever the time of year, though fortunately, even December is usually pretty clement in Rome – as long as it's not raining. They serve great cocktails and inexpensive *aperitivi* here as well as fabulous hot chocolate. Be here by 7pm to get a table outside – the square may be quiet but the caffè certainly is not. Cocktails cost around €8.

Price range €

## ► BUCATINO 14

Via Luca della Robbia 84/86, Testaccio

+39 065 746 886

[www.bucatino.com](http://www.bucatino.com)

This is a little off the beaten track as it's located in the old meatpacking district, but it is worth making the detour to for the great traditional and inexpensive lunch menu you can enjoy here. It still offers a traditional *antipasti* buffet, which you rarely see in Rome any more. Great value at lunchtime. Closed on Mondays.

Price range €

## ► DON CHISCIOTTE 15

Piazza Navona, 103-105

+39 066 8217 140

[www.gruppodonchisciotte.com](http://www.gruppodonchisciotte.com)

Despite its prestigious location, this ristorante/pizzeria/bar serves good value food, offering a selection of fresh fish on the menu alongside the pizza.

Price range € €

## ► CANOVA 16

Piazza del Popolo, 16-17

+39 063 612 231

[www.canovapiazzadelpopolo.it](http://www.canovapiazzadelpopolo.it)

This would be my pick of the spots to stop for a coffee or a bite in the beautiful Piazza del Popolo. Sit outside to enjoy the view, or get a better price on the set menus by eating in the contemporary interior inside or in their interior courtyard.

Price range € €



## DON'T MISS

## ICE SKATING

Alongside the Christmas lights, many open air ice rinks pop up around the city in the run up to Christmas. Usually it is free to enter the ice rink, and you pay to hire your skates – or bring your own. The most reliable one – as they move around every year – is at the Castel Sant' Angelo, which also hosts a small Christmas market, but you will find other rinks all across the city.

► budget, and to avoid the wet December weather in Rome, head to Testaccio market in Via Galvani. As well as many traditional food stalls, go beyond the tripe sandwiches and you'll find a whole row of shoes, belts

a wonderful Christmas gift to myself – a fabulous weekend in Rome where I can spend money guilt free, as I'm buying for others! That's got to beat anything I could find wrapped under the tree on Christmas morning. R

*I have bought some great gifts that I would not have found on the UK high street*

and leather good for sale at market prices. It is open Monday to Saturday, from 6am to 3pm.

So have I saved money by doing my shopping in Rome? The few designer gifts I have bought seem to have been, typically, a few euros cheaper than they would have been had I bought them in the UK. There's no denying that I have also bought some great gifts that I would not have found on the UK high street, but putting this list together, I have seen that most of the shops do take online orders and ship internationally. So really, even with me flying with easyJet, I could probably have done this cheaper from behind my computer. But of course, I never would have. And as well as gifts for others, the trip has provided me with

## GETTING THERE

## ► BY PLANE

You can fly to Rome direct from all the London airports, including City, as well as from Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Glasgow Prestwick, Leeds Bradford, Manchester, Newcastle and Shannon. You can even fly direct from the USA – Alitalia, American, Delta and United all have non-stop connections to New York, and Alitalia also fly direct from Miami. From the airport you can take the Leonardo Express Train to Rome Termini, which runs every 30 minutes from track 24. The journey takes 30 minutes and costs €11. To connect with the metro at Tiburtina Station or at Ostiense Station the train costs €5.50.

## ► BY TRAIN

From London it's a 14-hour journey via Paris and Milan or Turin.



Dusk on Via dei Condotti



Glam looks at Piazza del Popolo



Artisan presepe figures on sale



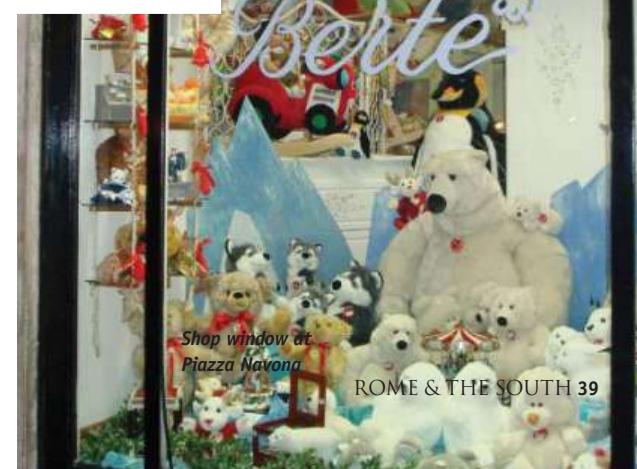
Via dei Condotti seen from the Spanish Steps

## DON'T MISS

**CONTEMPLATION WITH THE NUNS**  
 Enter the Basilica of the Santi Quattro Coronati and you'll see an unassuming wooden door to the left of the altar. Between 10 and 11.45am, and 4 and 5.45pm, if you knock you will be admitted to a 12th century cloister that is still used by the Augustinian Order today. Donations are invited.



Christmas lottery tickets



Shop window at Piazza Navona

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I WOULD NEVER SUGGEST that a visitor to Rome deliberately miss any of the major sights. I don't want to be responsible for that maddening feeling, like an itch in an inaccessible spot, that you really should have tossed a coin in the fountain. Go where you will, though, the crowds, the noise, the ersatz gladiators, the endless queue to risk your fingers in the *Bocca della Verità* – sometimes the strain is worse than a simple itch.

So let me describe a place, not far from Villa Borghese, which is historically important, beautiful, calm, and comparatively little visited. Pope Julius III commissioned a little getaway among the vineyards on the slopes of Monte Parioli. He entrusted the work to the finest artists and architects available; Vignola, Ammanati, Vasari, and Michelangelo all contributed. Work began in 1551 and continued until 1553. The result, Villa Giulia, is a lovely Mannerist complex. Its vineyards once extended down the

# Resting by a quiet fountain

*There is a portal like a miniature triumphal arch in the centre of the main building's sober front; at the back is a semi-circular loggia*

slopes of the hill to the Tiber River, so that the Pope and his friends could access the site by boat on pleasant afternoons and have luncheon by the *fontana segreta* in the cool, secluded nymphaeum, sheltered by loggias decorated with statuary and supported by caryatids. The fountain was fed by the Acqua Vergine, the aqueduct which also supplies the Trevi Fountain.

There is a portal like a miniature triumphal arch in the centre of the main building's sober front; at the back is a semi-circular loggia, with walls in Pompeian-style fresco; the barrel vaults are decorated with images of trellised plants, among which play mischievous putti. My favourite scene depicts two putti disputing, each grasping and twisting the other's nose. Past the loggia there are courtyards, gardens, a copy of an Etruscan temple, and the three levels of the nymphaeum.

The building, which was seized by the Italian state in 1870, now houses the Museo Nazionale Etrusco, with a very important collection of Etruscan antiquities. The most moving of these is a terracotta sarcophagus from Cerveteri, upon whose cover are the figures of a young married couple, half-reclining as if at a banquet.

Both are smiling, with the familiar archaic smile of early statuary. It is an enchanting picture of marital harmony and love.

There are 6th century BC figures of Hercules and Apollo. The Sun God is also smiling the smile of long ago. There are vases, urns, household items, statuary, and jewellery as old as King Minos. The collection is worth your attention, certainly. But spend time too among the hedges in the parterre gardens, or rest in the shade of the loggias. You may see a charming sight: young art and architecture students sitting on 16th century steps, sketchbooks on their knees, heads bent in concentration, trying to capture the grace of what they see.



*The courtyard with loggia in Villa Giulia*

## ABOUT THE WRITER

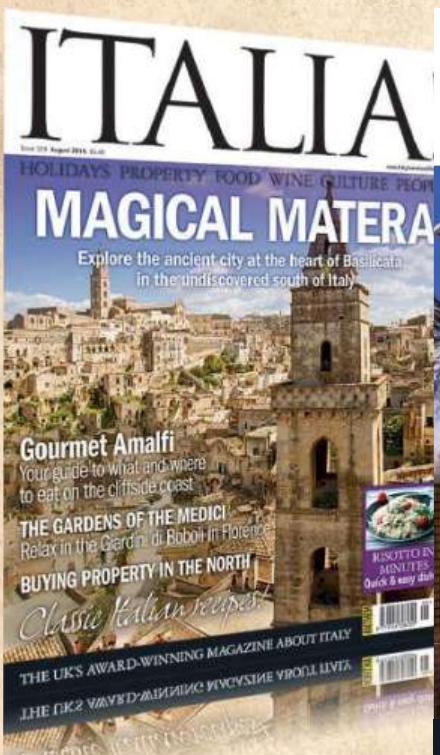
JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer, based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.



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# Rome for families

**James Miller** and his wife take the children to Rome for some extra-curricular education and discover a real family-bonding experience, and the fact that there is a great pizza parlour right in front of the Pantheon...

**A**s a family we're quite lucky, courtesy of the children's television programme *Horrible Histories*. Our two youngsters, at age nine and six, are fascinated with the intrigue and excitement of ancient history. There are many places in the UK where children can learn about Ancient Rome, including their own school syllabus, however we've always told

them that there's nothing like the real place, where you can literally see the sites and touch the history yourself. And as we approached the Colosseum our nine-year-old daughter and six-year-old son's expressions said it all. Their imaginations were firing with scenes of gladiatorial combat and emperors determining the fate of combatants through a simple gesture of thumbs up or down.



*St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City*

Photography © James Miller

Despite the queues, the children's enthusiasm wasn't dampened at all and when they entered the Colosseum they couldn't believe the epic scale of the arena. Our son was particularly intrigued to know where it was that the lions ate the Christians. It was at this stage we wondered if a parental guidance certificate should be applied to the morning's history lesson.

We swiftly moved on to less gory facts about the monument's past, explaining how the Colosseum was built upon the site of the eccentric Emperor Nero's lake, and how this amphitheatre set the precedent for countless others across the Empire – some of which our children had seen in Britain. Starting at the Colosseum was a great way to begin the trip as the children were desperate to see more of what the city had to offer.

Our daughter convinced us that a key part of the Roman cultural experience was finding a genuine Roman *gelateria*. Luckily, I knew just the place, the renowned Tre Scalini in the Piazza Navona. While the children enjoyed their *fragola* (strawberry) ice-creams and were as revved up as two turbo-charged Vespas, my wife and I thought we had better replenish our caffeine and sugar levels to ensure that we were all on a level playing field. We had one of the café's famous chocolate tartufos. And of course this was in no way over-indulgent as we were actually experiencing history. We convinced ourselves of this when we discovered that the Tre Scalini actually created the recipe in 1946.

Outside the café, my wife was drawn to the Baroque beauty of

one of the three fountains of Piazza Navona, the fountain of the four rivers. She stood mesmerised for quite some time. The four nudes of the fountain represent major rivers across the world and, like many of the sculptures adorning the eternal city, this work is attributed to the genius of Bernini. Bernini's true mastery lay in his ability to immortalise the majesty of the human form in motion. The majesty of Rome's art gives the city an almost dream-like quality and fortunately for those day-dreaming of baroque, Bernini's legacy is everywhere for all to enjoy.

Next we went to the gardens of the Villa Borghese, where my wife and I could stroll through the outdoor space and enjoy the classical architecture dotted around the park. ➤



*There are many places where children can learn about Ancient*

*Rome, but we've always said there's nothing like the city itself*

## WHERE TO EAT

### ► TAVERNA DEI QUARANTA

Via Claudia, 24

✉ +39 06 700 0550

[www.tavernadeiquaranta.com](http://www.tavernadeiquaranta.com)

This historic restaurant dating to 1894 has an ambience perfect for those wanting to experience old-school Rome dining. Its intimate and family-friendly atmosphere ensures a warm welcome. It is centrally located near to the Colosseum and the rustic food is hearty and delicious.

Price range  

### ► FORTUNATO AL PANTEON

Via del Pantheon, 55

✉ +39 06 679 2788

[www.ristorantefortunato.it](http://www.ristorantefortunato.it)

This stylish and spacious restaurant has an excellent reputation and its clientele includes Italian politicians who appreciate the sophistication and finesse this restaurant offers. The staff do their best to uphold its well-deserved reputation as one of the city's best restaurants.

Price range   

### ► ROMA SPARITA

Piazza di Santa Cecilia, 24

✉ +39 06 580 0757

[www.romasparsita.com](http://www.romasparsita.com)

Located in a charming location in the laid back Trastevere district, this restaurant has a beautiful outdoor dining area that enables its patrons to soak up the unique Trastevere atmosphere while dining al fresco. The restaurant serves pizzas that are always in demand by the locals.

Price range 

### ► BAR TRE SCALINI

Piazza Navona, 28

✉ +39 06 6880 1996

[www.trescalini.it](http://www.trescalini.it)

Piazza Navona has many treats and this bar is one of them. Offering a wide range of ice-cream flavours and their trademark 'Tartufo' chocolate ice-cream dessert – an original recipe from 1946. The bar also offers a range of dishes for something more substantial.

Price range  

### ► LA PERGOLA

Via Alberto Cadolo, 101

✉ +39 06 3509 2152

[www.romecavalieri.com](http://www.romecavalieri.com)

The last word in fine Roman dining, the Pergola is world famous. Its sophisticated and delicious cuisine makes for a simply outstanding gastronomic experience. La Pergola's rooftop terrace offers views to St Peter's and the Roman skyline. For an absolutely unforgettable experience La Pergola is a must. No, it isn't cheap but for a special treat it's worth every penny.

Price range   



*Coffee for the grown-ups,  
ice-cream for the children*

*The Colosseum proved  
a great place to begin*



*The ruins at the Forum  
hide many tales*



*Our son was particularly intrigued to know where the lions ate the Christians,  
we wondered if a parental guidance certificate should be applied*

We spent some time in the Villa Borghese itself enjoying the Renaissance artwork. The combination of lush green open space, water features and beautiful sights was a thoroughly uplifting experience and an opportunity for the children to burn off some energy, before dinner and bedtime.

That evening we had our dinner in the restaurant roof garden of the hotel forum. The children were chatting about the events of the day. They were particularly competitive in determining who was the maddest emperor, Nero or Caligula. The restaurant provided the perfect ambience for our meal and gazing out to the illuminated forum over a glass of wine was a perfect end to the day.

After enjoying a night of well-earned sleep, we were up and raring to tread the ancient streets of the Eternal City again. The first destination was the Vatican Museum to show the children something that my wife and I had seen many times before that never fails to give us

an unforgettable sense of awe, the Sistine Chapel.

After navigating through the many corridors and chambers of the Vatican Museum, we arrived at the chapel itself. Worryingly, the custodians of the chapel, who were stood at an elevated position from the crowds, seemed to be exercising strict crowd control, with an authoritative "Ssshhh!" every time the tourists' murmurings became too loud. We explained to the children that if they didn't want to get an emperor's thumbs down, they needed to speak a little more quietly. We told the children that they had to treat this place as a spot to rest in to get the full benefit from it. Many people make the mistake of simply walking in, thinking 'sight done' and walking out. If you stay here for a while and really make the effort to absorb the works of Michelangelo and his depiction of the Last Judgement, ➤



*Youngsters like having their photograph taken...*

## WHERE TO STAY

### ► ROME CAVALIERI

Via Alberto Cadolo, 101

✉ +39 06 35091

[www.romecavalieri.com](http://www.romecavalieri.com)

This hotel is one of the best in Italy. It offers a variety of rooms and suites and its grounds have a number of swimming pools that make it a veritable playground for those wishing to experience Rome in complete luxury – although it's so luxurious, you may not want to leave the hotel during your stay.

### ► HOTEL FONTANA

Piazza di Trevi, 96

✉ +39 06 679 1056

[www.hotelfontana-trevi.com](http://www.hotelfontana-trevi.com)

Situated in front of the magnificent Trevi Fountain this hotel is perfectly located next to one of Rome's most iconic sites. The staff are friendly and attentive and the rooms are good value for money considering the location. The breakfast area overlooks the Trevi fountain, providing a truly Roman start to the day.

### ► HOTEL REGINA BAGLIONI

Via Vittorio Veneto, 72

✉ +39 06 421 111

[www.baglionihotels.com](http://www.baglionihotels.com)

With historic links to Italy's former queen, this hotel offers a sumptuous and regal experience. Located close to some of Rome's most popular sites and Rome's fashion district, the Baglioni is stylish and glamorous. The Baglioni's rooms are styled in the art deco style and offer a luxurious night's sleep.

### ► ROSE GARDEN PALACE HOTEL

Via Boncompagni, 19

✉ +39 06 421741

[www.rosegardenpalace.com](http://www.rosegardenpalace.com)

This hotel has a variety of apartments and rooms. It prides itself on the fusion of classical styling and contemporary lines. The hotel has an indoor pool and fitness centre, and offers excellent service in a charming and historic setting that is easy walking distance from the main attractions.

*The Pantheon was rebuilt by the Emperor Hadrian*

*The head of the Colossus of Constantine*



*The children were thrilled to be eating in front of a real Ancient Roman temple and my wife and I were thoroughly enjoying the ambience*

it really can be quite an intense and moving experience.

Some schools of thought assess that the range of emotions expressed in the painting reflect the pain, anguish and conflict felt by the painter himself. Although this conversation was between my wife and I, as we thought it would be a little deep for our six-year-old, who was busy craning his neck in wonderment at all the brightly-coloured figures that had been so attentively painted some 473 years ago.

Our next stop was the Castel Sant'Angelo. Our children were determined to meet the challenge of getting to the top to see the views across Rome. The castle once served as a tomb for the Emperor Hadrian and was later used as a papal fortress. When we arrived at the top the views were utterly breath-taking. The Tiber sweeps

through the city and the skyline is dotted with terracotta rooftops, lush treelines and turquoise basilicas. My wife remarked that we had satisfied our culture vulture appetites for art, beauty and meaning and now it was time for some well-earned indulgence through shallow material satisfaction. We shortly arrived at the designer shops near the Spanish Steps. At the sight of the sleek Italian shoes, my wife had an expression comparable only to my son's when gawping at the angels and demons painted on the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. Rome does indeed cater for all tastes and things of beauty don't always have to be more than 300 hundred years old.

Once the Italian retail therapy had been administered we decided to have a quick espresso in the historic Caffè Greco. This café has been frequented by the great and





*The Altare della Patria,  
or Vittorio Emanuele  
monument*

the good of Europe's history, from famous composers such as Wagner to lothario bounders such as Casanova. It was like being transported to the bygone era of 18th century Rome. Walls bedecked in gilded mirrors and paintings. The staff were impeccably dressed and if it wasn't for the thunderous roar of an Italian sports car outside we could have been in 1760, the year of the café's founding. The coffee was strong enough to propel us on to our next destination with the enthusiasm and energy of a prancing and horse.

After the children had finished playing around the baroque fountain at the bottom of the Spanish Steps, they were bounding up the steps to the very top. We all took a seat on one of the steps and soaked up the atmosphere of our location. The steps were full of people, families enjoying their holidays and young couples seeking a romantic spot surrounded by bougainvillea. This is one of the many historic and public locations of Rome that is so

beautiful it just evokes good vibes from everyone there. We stayed at the Spanish Steps to savour this precious family time in such a special location, watching the world go by beneath us.

The evening was drawing in and we had all worked up an appetite fit for a Roman legionnaire. We decided to eat in the piazza in front of the Pantheon. The food was delicious and we enjoyed typical Roman pasta dishes. The children were thrilled to be eating in front of a real Ancient Roman temple and my wife and I were thoroughly enjoying the ambience the floodlit Pantheon created. This meal marked the end of our trip and we felt as though we had developed our children's fascination with the history of the Caesars and their treasure trove of art and culture. Although more importantly, our trip to the Eternal City had ensured that we made some unforgettable and epic family history of our own that we will all treasure forever. 

## WHAT TO SEE AND DO

### ► TREVI FOUNTAIN

*Piazza di Trevi*

The Trevi is one of the most beautiful and iconic sites in Rome. With its dramatic statues of Triton and his sea-horses surrounded by crashing water, this truly is a baroque masterpiece that never fails to draw the crowds. No trip to Rome is complete without visiting the Trevi Fountain.

### ► GLADIATOR SCHOOL

*Via Morsasco, 9*

**+39 340 464 4078**

The staff of the Gladiator School are incredibly passionate about Rome's imperial history and the legacy of the infamous gladiators. They offer budding gladiator aspirants a chance to step back in time to experience gladiator training in their own sandy arena. Great fun while also an energetic and fascinating history lesson. (Fantastic if there's a little too much energy going on.)

### ► BIO PARCO

*Piazza del Giardino Zoologico, 1*

**+39 06 360 8211**

[www.bioparco.it](http://www.bioparco.it)

Rome's Bio Park provides families with young children a chance to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and take a break from culture and art. Situated in the Park of the Villa Borghese, the Bio Park promises a fun time for children with a wide range of animals to enjoy and wide open spaces to play in.

### ► CAPITOLINE MUSEUMS

*Piazza del Campidoglio, 1*

**+39 06 06 08**

[www.museicapitolini.org](http://www.museicapitolini.org)

The Capitoline Museums boast a wide range of archaeological treasures and make a fascinating day out, offering a deep insight into Rome's imperial past. Opened to the public in 1734, they are considered to be the first public, and among the most important, museums in the world. And... the building that houses them was designed by Michelangelo.



*The Trevi Fountain  
will delight children*



THERE IS AN OLD CITY NEAR THE SEA, 90 kilometres northwest of Rome, in Lazio. If you visit Tarquinia, you will see a well-preserved medieval town with impressive 11th-century walls and 20 towers from the 12th century. There is also an important archeological museum in a noble 15th-century *palazzo*. Tarquinia's a fine and pleasant place, but it is not the old city.

To reach the old city, you must venture east, past the town walls a kilometre or so, to a place called Monterozzi.

Here is the old city; parts of it are nearly 2,000 years older than Tarquinia's walls. It is the necropolis, the city of the dead. Its residents, when they lived, were inhabitants of the first Tarquinia, deserted long ago and replaced in medieval times by today's city. Of the first Tarquinia, almost nothing survives except for the tombs. We know little about their builders. Their tomb painting, like their sculpture, is vivid but enigmatic. Their language, written

# La Necropoli di Monterozzi

*Its residents, when they lived, were inhabitants of the first Tarquinia, deserted long ago and replaced in medieval times by today's city*

in Greek-style characters, remains largely undecipherable, and documents are scarce. Kings from Tarquinia ruled Rome half a millennium before Augustus, but Rome wrote their history; their own version is missing. The Emperor Claudius is said to have been among the last people who could read their language. He wrote a treatise on the subject, but it has been lost.

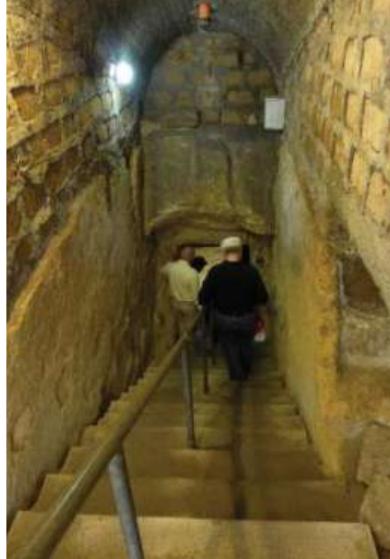
They were the Etruscans. From the Tiber to the Arno, their cities, like Tarquinia, once flourished. Tuscany is named after them, and so is the Tyrrhenian Sea – from the Greek version of their name. Perhaps they even named Rome, if Etruscan Ruma became Roma. DH Lawrence was fascinated by the Etruscans. He visited Tarquinia in 1927, first stopping at Cerveteri. He made no secret of his sympathy for them in their ancient struggle with Rome. “The Etruscans, as everyone knows, were the people who occupied the middle of Italy in early Roman days, and whom the Romans, in their usual neighbourly fashion, wiped out entirely...”, he wrote in *Etruscan Places*.

At Monterozzi, the painted tombs of the old city inspired him. You can retrace in his footsteps to where the dead spend eternity surrounded by strange, elaborately decorated walls. One room he describes, the Tomb of the Leopards, portrays men and women at a joyous banquet. Musicians play, drunken guests dance, guarded by a pair of ferocious leopards. Most of the tombs seem to recall the pleasures of life, some with an explicitness that rivals the Kama Sutra. What the Etruscans loved, they took with them to the grave, sacred or profane.

“It all seems so gay and light,” Lawrence wrote. “Yet there is a ... depth of significance that goes beyond aesthetic beauty. If one starts looking, there is much to see. But if one glances merely, there is nothing but a pathetic little room with unimposing, half-obliterated, scratchy little paintings in tempera.” 



*Here: The Tomb of the Leopards. Above: descending into the ancient tombs*



## ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer, based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.

# ON FOOT IN THE *Sabine Hills*

There isn't much of Italy you could describe as 'undiscovered', but **Rebecca Ford** finds something close – and just an hour from Rome...

We had been walking for a couple of hours when we came to the little meadow. It was early summer and the poppies were in bloom. Some farmers were hard at work haymaking: one man driving a tractor, another standing on the back and heaving great forkfuls of hay into a baler. It was hot work and he had to stop every so often to wipe his forehead. Bundles of golden hay soon lay scattered across the field, filling the air with their delicate scent. The men stopped, chatted and took a drink. I felt as if I had been transported to the 1950s, yet this peaceful rural scene was unfolding in 21st-century Italy – and just an hour's drive from Rome.

You might think it's impossible to find anywhere 'undiscovered' in Italy today – certainly not within

Foot Holidays, who have pioneered self-guided hiking trips in this area. They book your accommodation, transfer your luggage, and provide detailed written instructions and route maps – all you have to do is walk and enjoy the scenery.

It may be little visited today, but Sabina has a rich history that stretches back thousands of years – traces of settlement have been found from the Palaeolithic era. It was around the 9th century BC that the Sabini, a tribe from the Adriatic, arrived. They gave the area its name ('Sabinum' in Latin), founded cities, and established a powerbase that stretched as far south as Campania. Eventually their territories were absorbed by Rome and these verdant hills became home to wealthy Romans who built lavish villas, planted vineyards and grew olives.

Our first base was Contigliano, a medieval hilltown that was once



*We crossed a wildflower meadow, startling a herd of goats that looked astonished to see humans, and eventually reached a stone water trough*

easy reach of a tourist hotspot. However I think I might just have managed it. We were in Sabina, a region of densely wooded slopes, sleepy hilltowns and olive groves that sits to the northeast of Rome, lodged between the Tiber plain and the Apennine peaks. It's an area that doesn't boast about its treasures, but lets you discover them for yourself. Since relatively few visitors make it out this way, the roads are quiet and the footpaths quieter still, making it an ideal place for a walking holiday. We had travelled with On

a place of pilgrimage. We arrived to find an unexpected traffic jam: it was the feast of Santa Rita, 'the patron saint of cars', and drivers were queuing in the narrow streets so their vehicles could receive a blessing from the priest. He stood white-robed outside the church, cheerfully flicking holy water on the passing bonnets. The owners acknowledged his attentions by noisily parping their horns. It was wonderfully Italian. After checking



*Clockwise from above: Contigliano; message on a plaque (see text for translation); the Fonte Lallo; the streets of Contigliano; the Sabine Hills*





into our B&B, we went for a stroll. The cars had already disappeared and the cobbled streets were empty, save for a few snoozing cats. Several of the picturesque stone buildings seemed lifeless and neglected, suggesting an element of benign decay. I couldn't help feeling that this was how much of Tuscany was before it 'boomed'. We made our way to dinner. Viviana, our host, had booked us a table in the local restaurant: homemade gnocchi with gorgonzola for him, fresh saffron ravioli with spinach for me. I had a glass of red wine. Just the one. I didn't fancy hiking with a hangover.

We set off early next morning armed with a packed lunch, map, route notes and small rucksacks crammed with the assorted paraphernalia a long walk demands – plasters, spare laces, waterproofs, a compass... I applied lashings of sunscreen. Within minutes the heavens opened and the waterproofs were pressed into service. This first day's walk was to be an 11km (6.8 mile) hike to the neighbouring hilltown of Cottanello, famed for the stunning medieval refuge dedicated to St Cataldo which is carved into a roadside rock. The first section was accurately billed as 'hard' and led us on narrow tracks up the steep sides of the wooded Capoconate valley. The rain, coupled with fallen leaves and mosses, made it slippery underfoot and I was relieved that I'd followed the joining instructions and packed walking

poles. Eventually, after much cursing on my part, we reached a rocky outcrop. Beside a cave was a plaque: '*A te che tra queste montagne*', it began. Our notes helpfully translated: 'To you who have lived and suffered in these mountains / To you who have taught me to walk the footpaths of life. Augusto Donati 1913-1997'. Here was one, I felt, who had also slithered up the hillside in the rain.

From this point the walking became easier, the rain stopped and the sun came out. We crossed a wildflower meadow, startling a herd of goats that looked astonished to see humans in such remote country, and eventually reached a stone water trough we identified from our notes as Fonte Lallo. We took lunch by the spring, enthusiastically serenaded by a cuckoo, before continuing to follow red and white waymarkers up sheep tracks, past a reservoir and through a wood. The walk seemed longer than expected but it was only when we passed the reservoir again and reached Fonte Lallo again that we suspected we might just



#### FACT FILE

► On Foot Holidays' Walking tours of the Sabine Hills cost £710 per person, includes 7 nights in double/twin room, 4 evening meals, all breakfasts, 2 picnics, all walking-route transfers, luggage moving. Flights to Italy not included. Extra nights and shorter options available.  
☎ 01722 322652  
[www.onfootholidays.co.uk](http://www.onfootholidays.co.uk)



► have gone wrong somewhere. It was time to put On Foot Holidays' support system to the test. I called Viviana. Thankfully this was one place that could be reached by car and soon Roberto drove into view. "You went in a circle?" he grinned. "You're the only people who have ever done that." Reading over the notes later, I realised we'd taken a wrong turn just moments before the end.

*Above: Casperia.  
Below: Roman cellars beneath the Mole sul Farfa. Right: Stefano and his daughter Marit in the olive groves*

da Cortona and Poussin. It occurred soon after the foundation of Rome, when the Sabine rulers refused to give Romulus and his followers permission to marry their daughters; the Romans simply abducted them instead. When the Sabine army later retaliated and attacked Rome, the women, by now married and with children, intervened – bravely putting themselves between both sides and begging for peace. For some years afterwards a Sabine king, Titus Tatius, ruled jointly with Romulus.

The joy of walking is that you get an immersive experience of the landscape and our next route exemplified this to perfection. For hours we followed stony upland tracks and only heard the sound of birdsong and the buzzing of bees. Loveliest of all were the wild flowers, more than I have ever seen, in colours ranging from hot pink and magenta to buttery yellow

and then picked our way down sheep tracks to our agriturismo, the Fienile di Orazio. That night, after a succession of delicious home-cooked dishes, we stood in the garden and watched the fireflies light the darkness like earthbound stars.

Our walks continued in the same vein: meadows and wild flowers, cuckoo calls and gorgeous views. One day we made a detour for ice-cream in the hilltown of Salisano; another we paid a visit to Farfa Abbey, founded in the 6th century by the Benedictines and once enormously powerful. A path on a hill high above offered rewarding views over the plain to Rome – the dome of St Peter's a distant speck on the horizon.

Our final agriturismo was the Mole sul Farfa, belonging to the route advisor Stefano Fassone and his wife Elisabeth. He took us on a tour of the farm: to the Farfa river, to the remains of a 9th-century watermill,

*We sipped tea, feasted on the view and watched swallows swoop from the eaves.*

*The day's exercise made dinner that night all the more enjoyable*

Roberto drove us to our accommodation in Casperia, a picturesque village one day's walk past Cottanello, the usual overnight stop. Soon we were seated on the terrace of La Torretta, our handsome B&B. We sipped tea, feasted on the view and watched swallows swoop from the eaves. The day's exercise made dinner that night all the more enjoyable. Frittata, asparagus risotto, ravioli with sage – the courses kept coming, all accompanied by fine red wine and olive oil. Sabina was the first region in Europe to be awarded an EU PDO ('Protected Designation of Origin') stamp for its oil, in recognition of its distinctive qualities. Deep green, with a lovely peppery tang, it's well worth bringing home.

The Sabine Hills may now be celebrated for their oil but, like most people I guess, it was for a notorious event in their history that I best knew them. 'The Rape of the Sabine Women' has been much depicted, with celebrated interpretations by artists such as Giambologna, Pietro

and palest cream. At one point we passed a sign pointing to the Grotta di San Michele Arcangelo, a chapel cave hidden in the trees. Our notes informed us that it had once been dedicated to Vacuna, Sabine goddess of the woods and waters. We picnicked by a river, found wild orchids and aromatic herbs,

and into the labyrinth of Roman rooms that he had discovered beneath his house. In one were three stone troughs, a legacy of the original owners who had used them to process olive oil. Finally he led us to his olive groves, where donkeys grazed beneath the branches of 1,000 year old trees. We sat under their silvery leaves and watched the sun set slowly over the Sabine Hills. Rome seemed very far away. ®





## WHERE TO EAT AND STAY

### CONTIGLIANO

#### ► LOCANDA BELLARMINO

Piazza XX Settembre, 1

✉ +39 0746 707064

[www.locandabellarmino.com](http://www.locandabellarmino.com)

Clean, simply furnished, but comfortable B&B in a restored 15th-century residence run by Roberto and Viviana. 4 en-suite rooms. Double room €60 including breakfast.

#### ► LA TERRA DI PA

Via Umberto, 1

✉ +39 0746 706569

[www.colorhotel.it](http://www.colorhotel.it)

Family-run rustic restaurant nearly opposite the Locanda, with stone walls, wooden beams and fresh flowers on the table. Dishes include home-made pasta, salads and local meats. €35 for two.

### CASPERIA

#### ► LA TORRETTA

Via Mazzini, 7

✉ +39 0765 63202

[www.latorrettabandb.com](http://www.latorrettabandb.com)

Excellent B&B in restored historic building run by Welsh ex-pat Maureen and daughter Jennifer. Six rooms, all with private bathrooms, and a guest lounge with 15th-century frescoes. Free wi-fi. Double room €80-95 per night. Dinner is usually at a nearby agriturismo, Azienda Agricola – 6 set courses, including wine and coffee, €33 pp.

### MISCIANI

#### ► FIENILE DI ORAZIO

Località Misciani, Monte San Giovanni in Sabina

✉ +39 0746 205531

[www.fienelediorazio.it](http://www.fienelediorazio.it)

Organic farm in gorgeous countryside. Six comfortable en suite rooms and small swimming pool. Ornella and Mauro serve an evening meal that features their own produce; breakfast includes their homemade yoghurt and fresh local cheese. Free wi-fi. B&B €40 pp, half board €55 pp, dinner only €21 pp for 5 courses.

### MOMPEO

#### ► AGRITURISMO LE MOLE SUL FARFA

Strada del Mole

✉ +39 0765 469 037

[www.fiumefarfa.eu](http://www.fiumefarfa.eu)

Beautiful vegetarian agriturismo run by Stefano and Elisabeth; breathtaking views and a lovely swimming pool. Six comfortable en suite rooms, free wi-fi. The food might include *maltagliati* ('badly cut') pasta with tomato and black olive sauce, buckwheat pancakes with goats' cheese and walnuts. B&B in double room €40 pp, dinner €25 pp.

### ROME

#### ► B&B ALL'OROLOGIO

Via dei Banchi Nuovi, 47

✉ +39 335 520 7284

[www.orologiobb.com](http://www.orologiobb.com)

Most people choose to spend a night or two at the end of the trip in Rome. Clean, stylish and comfortable B&B very close to the Piazza Navona. €180-220 per room per night.

# Homes in Lazio

Rome is a justly famed destination, but the rural region that spreads outward from Italy's capital deserves to be much better known. Lovely landscapes and great-value property abound in this underrated part of central Italy, says **Fleur Kinson...**

**L**azio offers an extraordinary contrast – Italy's biggest city coupled with some of its quietest countryside. Mighty Rome sits in the middle of the region, but all around it stretch miles of leafy hills, pretty lakelands and uncrowded beaches. Home to nearly three million people, Rome is Italy's most populous city by a long way. (It's more than double the size of second city Milan). But elsewhere, Lazio is a relatively thinly-populated region of sleepy villages and friendly little towns. All in all, it offers homebuyers the best of both worlds; big city glitz and rustic tranquillity are always within easy reach of each other.

Rome is obviously one of Italy's key visitor destinations, but the delights of rural Lazio are little-known. This is largely because Lazio shares borders with Tuscany and Umbria, whose much-celebrated country charm have long overshadowed Lazio's and left the region relatively unexplored. And yet Lazio is full of all the things that usually pull in the visitors and foreign homebuyers. It has a long coastline, enticing islands, crystal-clear lakes ringed by fertile hills. It has rolling countryside striped with vineyards, quaint old hilltowns and wonderful weather. Plus it has historical relics to die for, with the whole region marking the heartland of both the Roman and Etruscan civilizations.

## THE MARKET

Just prior to the financial woes that began hitting home in 2008, Lazio was subject to quite a flurry of interest among property investors. It was widely tipped to be on the verge of becoming 'the new Tuscany' – with a boom in foreign buyers anticipated. But the international economic crisis put paid to all that. It prompted a huge drop in foreign buyers all over Italy, and so Lazio never saw its predicted moment of glory. Today it's still an under-valued region, with moderate prices (except in Rome, which remains one of Italy's very priciest spots).

Note that, as in other parts of Italy, Lazio's property prices sank a bit between 2008 and the present in the light of there being far fewer foreign buyers around. So now Lazio has homes that were never very expensive to begin with available for slightly less than they would have been asking in 2007. Plus many vendors remain open to offers below their asking price. So if you're looking for an affordable rural idyll in central Italy, you should definitely have a think about Lazio. Its prices are still much lower than in nearby Tuscany or Umbria.

And what kind of prices are we talking about? A very rough guide is always useful. Lazio has many village homes that can be had for less than €100,000 – with small houses ➤

*Access to Rome is a major draw of Lazio*



Photography © iStock, unless stated





*Lake Bolsena lies in Alto Lazio, in the north of the province of Viterbo*



## GENAZZANO

Type of property **Villa and villetta**

Number of bedrooms **5**

Price **Reduced to €295,000**

Location **Genazzano**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd ☎ 01322 660988**

**[www.casatravella.com](http://www.casatravella.com)**

This lovely five bedroom property is located in a tranquil area of the mediaeval town of Genazzano just 45km and one hour southeast of Rome, and 45 minutes from Ciampino airport, with magnificent views over the valley and Monti Lepini in the distance. The property, which is actually a main villa and smaller villetta consist of the following: Main Villa: Spacious living room with fireplace, kitchen, three bedrooms, and bathroom. Villetta: Kitchen, two bedrooms and bathroom. The properties are attached, although each has its own independent entrance. Each has its own individual terrace, and the property sits in 7,750sqm of land (almost two acres) with a sunny southerly aspect and some 200 olive trees and other fruit trees. Both properties are in excellent decorative order, are centrally heated, within a few minutes walk from all amenities in Genazzano including a number of good eating establishments, and are being sold furnished. The property has a security gate and lighting as well as lighting round the garden and there is ample parking. A beautiful property within easy access of Rome with separate accommodation for guests if required.

*The property has distant views to the Monti Lepini*



*Rieti sits on top of a small hill*

in fairly remote villages going for around €50,000 and in more accessible places for double this. Rural farmhouses to restore start at about €120,000, and habitable ones at about €180,000. Rome, as already suggested, is in a very different

Over the past twenty years or so, northwest Lazio – and especially the area around Lake Bolsena – has perhaps become the region's most popular rural stretch with foreign buyers. It's easy to see why this has happened. The rolling, lushly fertile

*The environs of Rieti near the Umbrian border have perhaps the lowest prices in the Sabine Hills*

league in terms of property prices. For a two-bedroom apartment in a reasonably central location, you would probably be looking at an outlay of €300,000 or more.

## KEY RURAL AREAS

If what you're looking for is a rustic retreat, or immersion in charming small-town life, Lazio is a great region to consider. Naturally, there are some parts that are more highly recommended than others. You should look at the area some 20 to 60 miles northwest of Rome – the beautiful hilly surrounds of Lakes Bracciano and Bolsena. Or perhaps 20 to 30 miles northeast of Rome – towards the leafy Sabine Hills. Or, if you like, some 10 to 20 miles southeast of Rome – to the pretty Albano Hills, which also contain a couple of lovely lakes. The more adventurous might also consider the rather wild 'Ciociaria' area that begins about 30 miles east of Rome and spreads for around 50 miles southeast from there.

landscapes here are profoundly beautiful and perfectly unspoilt, and the small towns and villages are very generally very attractive and interesting. Tuscany and Umbria both lie within easy daytripping distance, as does the coast.

*Anguillara Sabazia, Lake Bracciano*



Lake Bolsena itself sits in an environmentally protected basin, and there are far-sighted restrictions on new building which not only preserve the beauty of the area but safeguard the value of homes here. Village homes here can be bought up for around €100,000 and farmhouses regularly go on sale from around €180,000 upwards.

Closer to Rome, Lake Bracciano offers similar delights to Lake Bolsena and its surrounding area. Its property prices are a little higher, however, because it's perfectly possible for residents to commute to work from here into the capital.

With similar prices to those in northwest Lazio, the Sabine Hills area to Rome's northeast is another lovely place of rolling countryside dotted with medieval villages and old castles. It has seduced quite a few foreign buyers over the years and, as in northwest Lazio, you're likely to be able to connect with a few Anglophone residents in addition to the friendly local Italians themselves. The environs of Rieti near the Umbrian border have perhaps the lowest prices in the Sabine Hills.

#### COUNTRYSIDE AND COASTLINE

Seekers of rural idyll who want to make frequent trips to Rome might decide they want to opt for the enchanting Albano Hills area a dozen miles or so southeast of the Eternal City. As indicated earlier, ➤



## MY LIFE IN LAZIO

**R**osie Martin, originally from Liverpool, owns a small country house near Lake Bolsena in northern Lazio. She bought it as a holiday home in 2005, but is about to make a permanent move there with her new husband – a local man named Massimiliano.

What drew her to Italy, and to Lazio in particular? "I'd missed out on seeing much of Italy," Rosie explains, "as my first husband was a big Hellenophile and we took most of our holidays in Greece. Ancient history was a shared passion of ours. But after we divorced I started exploring Italy on my own and with my sister, and I absolutely fell in love with the country. Obviously I soon got to know Rome and other cities with Classical remains. Then one day a waitress in a café in Trastevere was telling me about her home on Lake Bolsena and I got interested in the area. It sounded beautiful, and I knew the place had been important to the Etruscans and the Romans, so I made a little trip up there. And the rest is... history, as they say!"

"My house is about four miles from the lake itself, on a hillside with wonderful views across the water. It was a bit ramshackle when I bought it, but luckily I didn't have to do any major restoration work. I would have found that terrifying! I re-did all the internal décor, refitted the kitchen and bathroom – that sort of thing. I have a good amount of land, and friends say I should have it landscaped, but I prefer it to look a little wild. What's the point of being in the country if you can't go a bit rustic, eh?!"

"My plan was only ever to use the house as a holiday home, and it worked very well for that purpose. But of course I got more and more sucked into life in the area. I worked hard at learning Italian, and that really paid off socially. Italians are super-friendly whether or not you have a shared language, but it was far more satisfying when I was able to have full conversations with them. Slowly, Italy began to feel more like home than home itself. And then I met Massimiliano, and that changed everything."

"My advice to anyone thinking of buying a house in Italy is to have a very good look around at all the wonderful areas you might consider. Don't just go for the places you've already heard of. Find an estate agent you can trust and who seems ready to give you a lot of personal attention. And learn Italian! Even if only a little. It makes a tremendous difference to how much you get out of this wonderful country."



## PANORAMIC VIEW AND UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE

Type of property Apartment

Number of bedrooms 2

Price €310,000 negotiable

Location Montefiascone

Contact +47 41270620

anne.liv.tonnessen@stavanger-kulturhus.no

Situated in the historic centre of Montefiascone, Lazio, this 100sqm apartment with 30sqm balcony is perfect for those who want to live in a quiet place with all the comforts that living in a town can offer. The apartment, on the top floor of a *palazzo*, has a unique atmosphere and is comprised of two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and living room, plus a dining room overlooking Lake Bolsena. The surroundings are beautiful – you are halfway between Lazio, Tuscany and Umbria. Vineyards and olive groves surround the city. The Mediterranean is 50 minutes' drive away.

Montefiascone in the province of Viterbo



Sperlonga, the home of Emperor Tiberius

these fertile hills are enhanced by a pair of pretty lakes, as well as several charming little towns such as Frascati and Palestrina. The atmosphere is surprisingly serene considering the area's close proximity to Rome.

If you're looking for some of Lazio's cheapest rural property set amidst mighty landscapes sprinkled with handsome old towns, do investigate the little-known 'Ciociaria' area far to the southeast of Rome, which stretches roughly from the elegant old spa town of Fiuggi to the dramatic hilltop abbey of Montecassino about forty miles away. Pronounced 'cho-cha-ree-a', this is a rather wild, proud

homebuyers have tended to be distracted by the Tuscan coast further north or the dramatic offerings of Campania further south. The result is that Lazio's coast remains relatively clean and uncrowded, with plenty of good-value property. Sperlonga, Gaeta and Ostia are three hotspots to consider, with a fair bit of attractive new development in all three. You could successfully target Romans and other Italians from within Lazio for rental clientele if you planned on offering holiday rentals.

Sea-lovers should also be aware of the delicious Pontine Islands which sit far out off the southern coast of Lazio. Little-known outside

*Lazio's coast remains relatively clean and uncrowded, with plenty of good-value property*

and fascinating area. It's not wholly unknown to foreign buyers (the town of Veroli and its environs has already drawn a few pioneering British homeowners), but it still has a 'well-kept secret' feel to it, as well as prices to match.

Not many places in Lazio are very far from the sea, of course, but if it's a coastal property you're looking for, this is not a bad region in which to consider buying. Lazio has a long, sandy Mediterranean coastline, but surprisingly few beach resorts of any great fame. Foreign holidaymakers and

Italy, the Pontines offer similar levels of dramatic geographical beauty to Capri a little further along the sea in Campania. Remote and otherworldly, they provide a wonderful sense of private escape.

## THE ETERNAL CITY

Finally, and inevitably, we come to Rome. And Italy's capital city is an entirely different world – certainly property-wise – to the rest of Lazio. As a legendary tourist magnet and a major employment hub, Rome has some of the most expensive property in Italy. Centrally-located two- ➤

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# LAZIO REGIONAL GUIDE



## INTRODUCTION

Lazio sits on the western side of central Italy, a longish region that in many ways is the geographical divide between northern and southern Italy. It bridges the two parts of the country and is home to the nation's capital Rome, the sublime Eternal City. The region has a population of a little over five-and-a-half million, but this figure swells by almost twice that amount each year as visitors flock to see the many attractions of Rome and the Vatican City. Lesser numbers visit the region's other towns and sites. Getting here and travelling around and about is easy, with good road and rail links across much of the Lazio region. Rome is served by two international airports:

Ciampino to the south of the city and Fiumicino towards the coast to the west. With the delights of Rome's city life easily accessible, and a wealth of rural beauty and historic towns all around – not to mention a pretty, up-and-coming coastline – Lazio is a good bet for buying property today, with generally lower house prices than those of its more popular northern neighbours, Tuscany and Umbria.

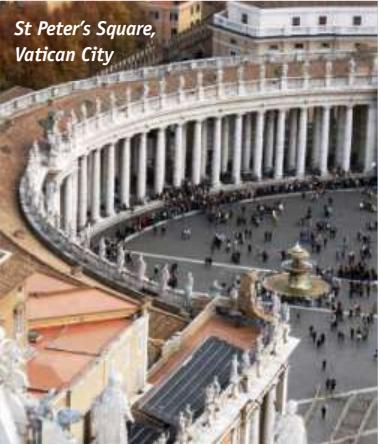
## ROME

① As you might expect, Italy's capital is one of the priciest places to buy property in Italy. But if you can afford a home here you will reap the rewards: not only is it one of the most iconic and eternally fascinating places that you could hope to have

a first or second home, its rental returns are pretty incredible, with a steady stream of visitors arriving here almost all year round. While all central apartments should do well for holiday rentals, the most popular are places within easy reach of a metro station and those that boast outdoor space in a terrace or balcony.

## NORTHERN LAZIO

② This picturesque area of Italy runs from just north of Rome to Lakes Bracciano, Vico and Bolsena. It was once a highly volcanic area – the trio of popular lakes were formed in the craters, and the surrounding countryside was made extremely fertile thanks to the lava deposits in the soil. As a result the vegetation is



St Peter's Square,  
Vatican City

lush, and vines, olive and fruit trees flourish. The area is also known as La Toscana and was originally occupied by the Etruscans, with evidence of their presence scattered across the area today. Northern Lazio is popular with both Italian and foreign buyers – and demand for property is increasing – but it remains, in general, less pricey than nearby Tuscany and Umbria. There are several pretty, historic towns in this part of Lazio, which would make a great base for a second home in a very 'Italian' part of the country, with good transport links, lovely scenery and a good range of amenities. The lakesides are popular holiday destinations too in a region that doesn't boast the most highly sought after coastal resorts.

## CENTRAL LAZIO

③ To escape the stifling summer heat, Romans tend to head for the local hills, in particular the hill-towns of the Castelli Romani. The climate and beauty of this rural area have made it an ideal summer retreat since Roman times. In this area you'll find lovely Tivoli with Villa Adriana and Villa d'Este, both of which attract many tourists today. Other gorgeous country villas in the area ensure that there is plenty to keep visitors occupied if they head out of the capital for a day or two. There are decent holiday rental prospects here, and the area, which is the region's most prolific area for winemaking, is a good spot to find yourself a base in very pleasant surroundings.

## SOUTHERN LAZIO

④ In general, southern Lazio is a quieter part of the region, a world away from the bustle of Rome. It's not as rich in historic remains as the north, but there is a growing tourist industry here, especially in Ciociaria – an unspoilt area in the foothills of the Apennines. Although this part of the region is starting to come to foreign buyers' attention, it is still largely undiscovered and prices here are some of the lowest in Lazio. If you'd like somewhere tranquil, pretty and steeped in traditional Italian charm, but within reach of Rome, this could be the area for you. At Lazio's furthest southern reaches, the landscape is more typical of Italy's south, markedly drier and less lush than northern Lazio, but the coastline is the best in the region, with attractive coastal towns like Sperlonga (former home of Emperor Tiberius) and Gaeta with its atmospheric grotto and huge castle.



Villa d'Este, a UNESCO World Heritage Site at Tivoli, near Rome

## Rome's Spanish Steps





## LUXURY VILLA CLOSE TO ROME CITY CENTRE

Type of property **Villa**

Number of bedrooms **4**

Price **On request**

Location **Rome**

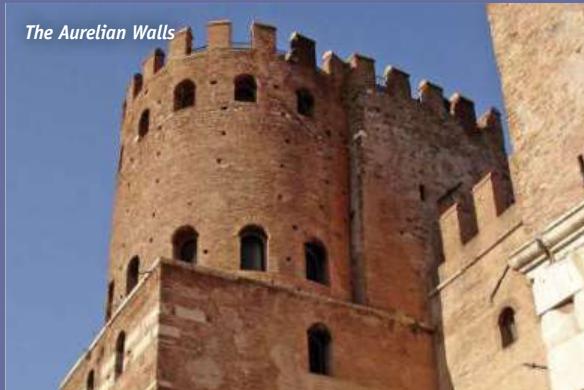
Contact **Caratelli Real Estate**

✉ +39 578 754107 / +39 334 1684212

[info@caratellire.com](mailto:info@caratellire.com) [www.luxuryhomes.it](http://www.luxuryhomes.it).

In the heart of the Ancient Appian Way park, close to the historic centre of Rome, in a beautiful park bordering the Aurelian Walls, we would like to present this prestigious villa – perfectly restored with precious materials. The real estate property is characterized by a large park of over 30,000sqm, well-maintained and adorned with flowers and various species of trees. The entrance, through two security gates, leads to an area designated for parking and to a garage. The villa is set on three floors and has a beautiful porch. The first floor comprises entrance hall with guest bathroom and utility room, large living room with windows that overlook the park and the pool, large dining room and kitchen area. On the second level we have the bedroom area which includes three bedrooms and two bathrooms (one with shower and one with bath); large closets in one of the three bedrooms, and a closet in the hallway. On the basement level there is a service area with kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, a cellar, two storage rooms, laundry room and a large walk-in closet. Possibility of installing an internal lift. Air conditioning, alarm system, automatic irrigation, swimming pool with jacuzzi, two automatic gates. The quality of the finishes and the classic style of the interior characterise the property as an ideal main residence or second home close to the centre of Rome.

*The Aurelian Walls*



*The popular Rome district of Trastevere*

bedroom apartments don't often go for less than €300,000 – and often for far more. Holiday rental returns, however, can be excellent. Twelve million visitors come through Rome every year, and many of them prefer the restful privacy and freedom of a self-catering apartment over staying in a hotel.

Owning a home in Rome makes it easy to enjoy frequent short trips from the UK to Italy, of course. There's no hour-long drive out to a house in the country after your plane touches down. And if you're thinking of making a permanent move to Italy, Rome is a good place

Also try to get a property with some form of outdoor space – a balcony, terrace or patio – as this is always a big selling point for leisure visitors. Note that beyond the *centro storico*, some of Rome's most popular districts include Trastevere, Parioli and Prati. Keep an eye on the latest guidebooks to Rome to see which other districts might be up-and-coming or newly fashionable and hip.

Rome certainly is magnificent, but any visitor to Lazio ought to be more aware of the delights that lie far beyond the Italian capital. Yes, all roads lead to Rome, but

*Owning a home in Rome makes it easy to enjoy frequent short trips from the UK to Italy*

to begin your adventure. You won't get lonely or bored, and you'll simultaneously give your Italian language skills a daily workout as well as being able to retreat to English-speaking ex-pat company as often as you like.

If you're just looking for a holiday home and you want to be able to cover as many of your costs as you can by renting it out to holidaymakers when you're not there, there are ways of optimizing rentability and maximising your clientele. Choose a home as centrally-located as you can afford, or at the very least near to public transport services into the centre.

they also lead away from it. And they can lead you into some deeply wonderful places.

Anyone seeking an affordable rural idyll in central Italy should consider Lazio and some of its most beautiful stretches of hilly countryside. In Lazio, the urban whirl and the rustic *dolce vita* are forever within comfortably easy reach of each other. ®

## USEFUL CONTACTS

[www.casatravella.com](http://www.casatravella.com)  
[www.luxuryhomes.it](http://www.luxuryhomes.it)  
[www.stavanger-kulturhus.no](http://www.stavanger-kulturhus.no)



IN THE PALAZZO MASSIMO ALLE TERME IN ROME, there are two statues in a rather small, bare room. One is an heroic bronze of the Hellenistic Age, the last great era of Greek art. It shows a nude young man leaning nonchalantly on a lance. His head seems just a bit too small for the larger-than-life-size body. He was, they say, a Seleucid prince, and the image was perhaps made in around 100 BC. The body is perfect, a paragon of male beauty. The face is smooth, the expression bland and slightly smug. I didn't feel, while viewing this piece of ancient eye-candy, that if the statue began to speak, he would say anything interesting.

The other figure, in bronze, is a middle-aged man sitting on a large stone. He, too, is nude (or nearly so), wearing only leather wrappings around his hands and wrists. His body is muscular and athletic, though it sags with exhaustion. It might be a paragon of classical beauty, too, except that his shoulders are spattered with blood (represented



# The boxer

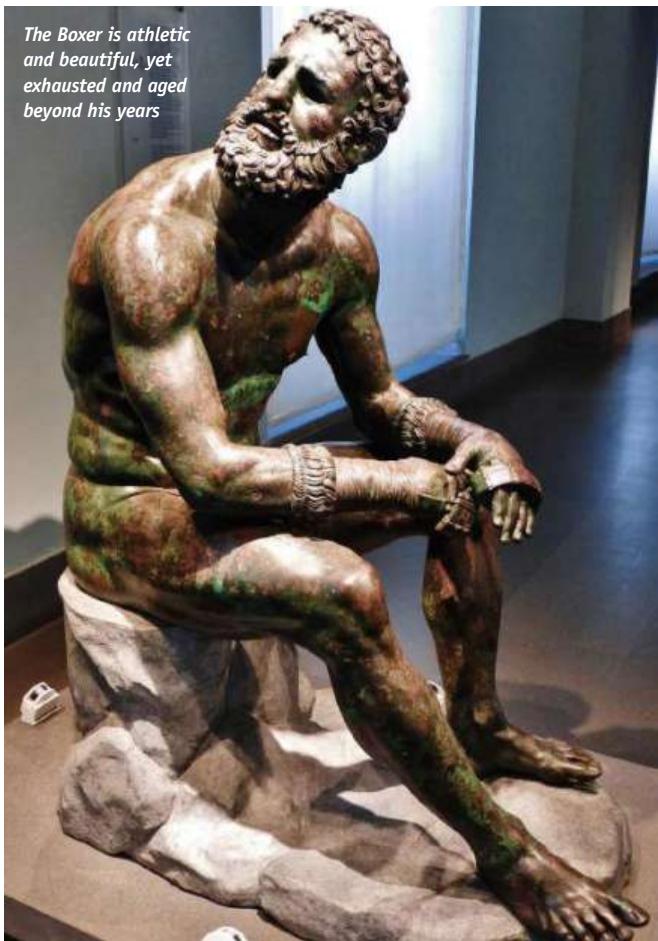
*To me, the man is not just a washed-up boxer. He's a brilliant metaphor for the wounds we all accumulate, body and soul*

by applied copper, red against dark bronze). His head is turned, as if looking at someone standing over his right shoulder. His hair and beard are thick and curly. His eyes are dark, because the sockets are empty, and show only the darkness within the hollow sculpture. Once, the sockets would have held eyes made of glass or stone, but they have been lost.

There are bleeding cuts, again represented by applied copper, on the bridge and end of his broken nose, on his forehead and eyebrows, and beneath his eyes, where the swollen flesh has split apart. His lips are swollen, too, and his ears. The sculptor has somehow managed to convey the impression of cumulative damage as well. The man slumped on the stone is old beyond his years, and immensely weary.

The figure was cast using the lost-wax process. It also is Hellenistic, and may date from between 330 BC and 50 BC. Some attribute it to Lysippos, Alexander's favourite sculptor, but most scholars disagree. Others say it is the work of Apollonius the Athenian, and that he signed it on a strap of the fighter's gloves. Or, of course, it could have been created by an ancient genius of whom we know nothing. It was found on the slopes of the Quirinal, in Rome, in 1885, during building excavations. Perhaps it came from the Baths of Constantine.

It may be that the battered face was designed to shock, or frighten, or simply demonstrate the sculptor's skill. I don't think so. I think the sculptor has attempted something profound, and achieved it. To me, the man is not just a washed-up boxer. He's a brilliant metaphor for the wounds we all accumulate, body and soul; when you go, look into his anguished face, swollen lips parted as if asking for mercy or rest. You may be tempted to whisper, "Rest, my friend. I understand." R



*The Boxer is athletic and beautiful, yet exhausted and aged beyond his years*

## ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.



*St Francis  
at the Convento  
dei Francescani  
Cappuccini*



*Sunset in Gubbio*



Photography © Lysa Walder



*Lysa preparing to  
fly to Florence*

# ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

The Path of St Francis is a walking trail inspired by the life of St Francis of Assisi that takes you from the north of Tuscany, down through Umbria and into Lazio. **Lysa Walder** starts at the top, then continues all the way on to Rome...

*The relative simplicity of carrying your world on your back and stepping out each morning in to the great unknown, losing and finding your way again, is fabulously enlightening*



**W**alking along the Via Francigena from Valle d'Aosta to Rome in 2013 whetted my appetite for ultra walking. No sooner had my first adventure finished than I was longing to begin the next and in October last year I took the leap again.

I found another pilgrims' trail, the Way of San Francis, which meanders from the Sanctuary of La Verna in northeastern Tuscany, down through Umbria and finishing in the Lazio region. I decided to extend the final stretch to suit my purposes and finish in Rome. The route would cover about 500km in 18 days, just a hop and a skip really when compared to the 999km in the 32 days of my first pilgrimage.

I flew to Florence and took the train from there to Arezzo; it was uncharacteristically warm and humid for October. First priority, I needed to find a place to sleep near the train station in Arezzo as I had an early start the next day. The next morning I was up with the larks and took the regional train to Bibbiena, from where I hopped on a bus along with dozens of school kids to the sanctuary.

#### THE FIRST OF MANY STEPS

From the sanctuary I took the first of many steps on the long journey and was swiftly immersed in dappled

sunlight and silence of the cool, damp, leafy woods of Mount Penna, populated with majestic ash, maple, beech and fir trees.

To walk along an ancient route for religious, spiritual, or any reasons actually, is a fantastic way to live in the moment. It was as if in some way I'd been returned to my factory settings. The relative simplicity of carrying your world on your back and stepping out each morning in to the great unknown, losing and finding your way again, is fabulously enlightening.

Hiking in solitude in the midst of the Italian countryside offered the opportunity to discover the less well known attractions of the regions, and in the process I discovered something of myself that had become lost amidst the noise and chaos of my ordinary city life. Out of necessity my inner strengths and resourcefulness kicked in, particularly when I was in pain, hungry, lost the path or struggled to find a bed for the night.

Encountering ordinary folk going about their day is a privilege that is rarely bestowed on a package tourist. A traveller on foot, however, will frequently pass the local characters chattering away on a bench in a tiny hamlet, playing cards in the only bar in the village or shouting out to each other from atop a ladder as they prepare nets to catch ripe olives in groves scored out of the earth with mathematical precision.

I was blessed with mostly warm and sunny days and never became immune to the staggeringly ➤

*Sunrise in Spello  
casting her spell*



Tilled fields by the road leaving Spoleto

beautiful vistas; I did however run out of suitable ways to adequately describe them. Even harder to convey is the incredible stillness and silence to be found while deep in the light of dappled woods or on the breezy ridge of a mountain. The familiar rhythm of one's own breath and boots on the rubble track is interrupted only by birdsong, the scuttling of lizards, or a dog barking in the distance.

Hilltop towns appear like crumbling praline wedding cakes erupting from the earth on the horizon. Once inside their ancient walls the pretty cobbled streets beg to be explored. Each a new place to meet people, hear the language and gorge on regional culinary delights. The smell of coffee issuing from tiny hole-in-the-wall bars and of stoves burning chestnut wood coupled with the feel of cobbles underfoot reminding me constantly of exactly where in the world I am privileged to be.

The Way of St Francis is, in every sense, as developed as it is today because of the efforts of one intrepid woman, Angela Seracchioli, who has over recent years painstakingly developed the signage, the distinctive yellow Tau crosses, that keep walkers on the right path. She has also enabled thousands of pilgrims, including myself, to more easily navigate the route through her guidebook *On the Road with Saint Francis*.

I should tell you about the highlights of my adventure, but how can I do that when every day was packed to the hilt with spellbinding scenery, stories of kindness and compassion and moments of unadulterated *gioia di vivere*? Don't for one minute get me wrong here because that doesn't mean that it was all a piece of pizza for me. At times it was hard, damn hard, especially in

the beginning before I really got used to the effort that walking up mountain and down valley required of my body. For example, I arrived exhausted and in great need of a long, cold glass of Moretti in Passo di Viamaggio after covering a hot and hilly 30km on day one of my journey, followed by an even more vertically challenging and sweaty 32km on day two. The physical effort this entailed meant that not only had I lost my body weight in perspiration but I practically climbed the stairs to my room in tears (after waiting until I was certain there was no one around to witness my plight) alternating between clambering on all fours and bottom shuffling because my hips had all but seized up and I couldn't lift my feet.

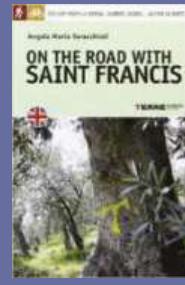
#### HAIR-RAISING MOMENTS

There was the occasional hair-raising moment, too. For example, when I rounded a bend on a deserted and densely wooded path I came face to face with a herd of enormous white cattle, each one armed with a set of lethal looking horns. Terrified, I couldn't remember if I should run, stare, avoid eye contact or roll into a ball. Instead I charmed them with a little cow whispering as I walked through the middle of them with feigned nonchalance, my heart banging like a drum in my chest, hoping they wouldn't gore me to death before using me as their sweaty human salt lick.

I was somewhat ill-advisedly walking during the hunting season, which caused another very scary moment because I came within a hair's breadth of being shot. Up until this point the sounds of the shotguns had generally been far enough in the distance not to worry me but ➤

#### INFORMATION

► Lysa kept to the pilgrims' path with the aid of *On The Road With Saint Francis* by Angela M Seracchioli. ISBN 978-88-6189-247-7. See also Angela's website at [www.diquipassofrancesco.it](http://www.diquipassofrancesco.it), which translates as 'Here walked Francis' and is the original Italian title of the book.





The familiar rhythm of one's own breath and boots on the rubble track is interrupted only by birdsong, the scuttling of lizards, or a dog barking in the distance





Tuscany beauty, at the top of the trail

*There were the random acts of kindness... The Croce Bianca staff who walked me to a hotel and introduced me to the owner because they didn't want me walking about on my own at night*

*Lysa with Anna in Stroncone*

one day I was marching through woodland when I heard the crack of shot and a bullet seemed to whistle past my head. I almost dropped to the ground in shock. Three hunters came into view. I said 'Ciao' but they obviously weren't the types for small talk so I quickly moved on; my path took me around a clearing and they continued to fire in my general direction while I prayed under my breath to all the gods that I may be granted another day of life. All my days on the front line working for the ambulance service in London had prepared me well; I just wish I'd thought to wear my bullet proof vest!

Then there were the random acts of kindness. The Croce Bianca ambulance staff in Arezzo, who very kindly left their post and walked with me to a little, reasonably priced hotel where they introduced me to the owner because they didn't want me walking about town on my own at night. Ivana and Maria, who baked me a whole apple and nut cake to take with me after I'd stayed in their B&B. Rosa and Linda, who hosted me in Spoleto and gave a fabulous guided tour of the city by night after a pizza supper. My friend Silvia's friend's parents, Iginio and Anna in Stroncone – wonderful hosts who sent me on my way with homemade wine and a packed lunch to feed the 5,000. Rosanna, who kindly took me home with her when I could find no B&B to sleep in. She asked me if I'd like to join her feeding her menagerie of farm animals on her *orta* before returning to eat supper which consisted of freshly laid eggs and more homemade wine. Marco

of Croce Rosa Italiana and Anna Rita with her homely Ostello Francescano in Valfabbrica, for a wonderful stay, and for taking me for breakfast and to the top of the tower of the church. Nicoletta, who spontaneously invited me to lunch with her family after I asked directions in the street. I'll never forget her kindness and generous spirit. Sister Carmella in the convent in Rome. Carla and Massimo in Rome. American couple Bill and Bonita, who paid for my night in Agriturismo Santa Giusta just because I gave her a check-up following a nasty fall and divvied up my painkillers with her.

#### THE BEATIFICATION OF PAUL VI

My last day, on the 18th October, arriving in Via Consillazione it was a unexpected, humid 32 degrees. The roads were closed, police and TV crew were everywhere. All of this was due to the double celebration of the conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the Beatification of the Servant of God Paul VI. (And there was me thinking it was all for me!)

The crowd dispersed at 13.00hrs, leaving me easily able to meet Silvia and one of my oldest friends, Jaine, and her family under the obelisk in Piazza San Pietro. We sweltered as we spent a couple of hours sight-seeing together before enjoying supper, now as a tourist and no longer a traveller – until the next time. (Which will be Via San Benedetto.) ®

*Lysa Walder is fundraising on JustGiving for Amnesty International UK Section Charitable Trust  
[www.justgiving.com/lysa-walder2](http://www.justgiving.com/lysa-walder2)*



THE FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATRE, most commonly called the Colosseum, is one of the most famous structures from the ancient world and is certainly one of the most iconic symbols of the *città eterna*, Rome.

The name of the structure defines its shape; *amphi* means two, or on both sides, and the building shape is created by placing two theatres facing one another to form an elliptic composition. The epithet Colosseum dates to the

Medieval period and refers to a huge Roman statue which was situated next to the amphitheatre, no longer in existence today. This statue was of Emperor Nero (54-68 AD) and was self-commissioned. He had wanted a mega gold-coloured statue of himself in the area where he had built his sumptuous palace, called the *domus aurea*. This palatial area also boasted a man-made private lake. Nero was the last of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, who were succeeded by the Flavian family. The new family, to demonstrate that they

# A history of the Colosseum

*The amphitheatre is original to the Roman world – only blood sport and violent entertainment took place here*

would represent a new era of great leadership and benevolence to the people of Rome, dredged Nero's lake and gave to the people the largest amphitheatre in the Roman world. They filled the hole with concrete and built this phenomenal four-tiered brick structure covered with white stone and decorated with statues. Later, in the Medieval period, when the building resembled a skeleton of its past and was overgrown with weeds, it was dubbed the Colosseum because of the more interesting statue next door.

The amphitheatre, structurally and philosophically speaking, is original to the Roman world. Only blood sport and violent entertainment took place here. This type of entertainment had not been in the Greek repertoire; theatre had been their main source of entertainment. While the Greeks built their theatres into hills so they could use the natural rise for the seating, the Romans, using the arch, could build large stable structures on flat ground wherever they desired. The elliptical shape meant that viewing was pretty good for all spectators.

It is estimated to have been able to accommodate around 50,000 people and was inaugurated in 80AD with 100 days of games during which no fewer than 9,000 animals perished. Spectacles were free and seat numbers were given out on clay tickets. There was a huge *velarium* (awning) to shade the public and perfume was used in the areas dedicated to the patricians to cover the putrid smell after so much bloodshed. In the early years, it was possible to flood the structure to also stage *naumachia*, or mock naval battles. This was brought to an end, however, when the ingenious system of underground levels was built, a reflection of the famous Roman engineering virtuosity. Hidden from public view, these were used to bring in the animals and made narrow enough so they could not turn around. The animals would then burst out into the arena through trap doors in the wooden floor. ®



*Above: the outside of the Colosseum  
This picture: the ruins inside today*

## THE WRITER

FREYA MIDDLETON is a private tour guide and writer who lives in Florence, Tuscany. You can read her blog online or learn more about her tours at [www.freyasflorence.com](http://www.freyasflorence.com)



WHEN GINO COPPEDÈ WAS COMMISSIONED to design a residential complex in the Parioli section of Rome, he knew he needed a unifying fountain. Since the time of Marcus Agrippa, who established hundreds of fountains in the city, no self-respecting neighbourhood could be without one. So, in Piazza Mincio, the heart of Coppedè's complex, he created the *Fontana delle Rane*, the fountain of the frogs. Piazza Mincio is actually just a traffic roundabout, with the fountain at its centre. It takes some quickness and daring to dodge the shiny sedans in the circle – this is a posh neighbourhood, housing several embassies, so the vehicle bearing down on you may be driven by someone with diplomatic immunity. But with luck you can get close enough to admire the whimsical little frogs lining the rim of the upper basin, and the larger frogs in the Baroque shells of the lower. You might think the fountain is from the era of Bernini, but the whole complex was created between 1919 and 1927.

Coppedè's commission gave him considerable freedom, and he exploited it with gusto. He created *palazzi* and villas in a bewildering (and rather bewitching) multitude of styles, about

# Something for everyone

*Serious books on the architecture of Rome seldom mention Coppedè's Quarter. If you enjoy it, you are indulging in a guilty pleasure!*

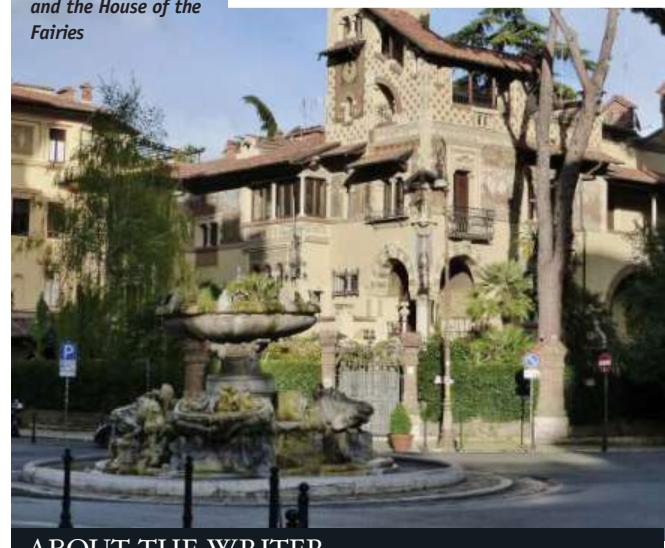
40 structures in all, around the area of Via Tagliamento and Via Dora. He loved ornamentation, and applied it exuberantly. Under a grand entrance arch, decorated with a huge, forbidding *mascherone* (sculpted face), and a frieze of garlands and Greek masks, hangs an enormous art-deco wrought-iron chandelier. On either side of the arch are towers of the *Palazzo degli Ambasciatori*, a large apartment block. The façades are encrusted with mannerist nudes, Romanesque and Renaissance loggias, Baroque balcony corbels, and medieval grotesques – all in travertine or marble.

Even more striking is the *Villino delle Fate*, the House of the Fairies, which is framed by the arch as you look past the fountain. I can't begin to tell you the derivation of its form, but it really doesn't matter. There are loggias, brick arches, half-arches, columns with capitals of every classical order and more. There are tiles, statues, a relief of the Capitoline wolf, art-nouveau wrought-iron balconies, a working sundial, and walls painted with images of Venetian galleys, Florentine cityscapes, Dante and Boccaccio.

Across Piazza Mincio is the *Palazzina del Ragno*, the Palace of the Spider, surprisingly harmonious in design, although constructed of brick, wood, stucco, marble, and stone. There is a stern marble mask of a king over the main entrance, as well as a menacing golden spider waiting within its web to greet you.

A walk through the neighborhood, now known as Quartiere Coppedè, can entertain and delight for hours, but Coppedè's imaginative vision was not well appreciated by contemporary architects in Italy. The Fascist dream of reviving the glory of Imperial Rome required an austere magnificence, and a lighthearted composite salute to Italy's architectural heritage was not useful. Even today, serious books on the architecture of Rome seldom mention Coppedè's Quarter. So beware – if you visit and enjoy it, you are indulging in a guilty pleasure! R

*The Frog Fountain and the House of the Fairies*

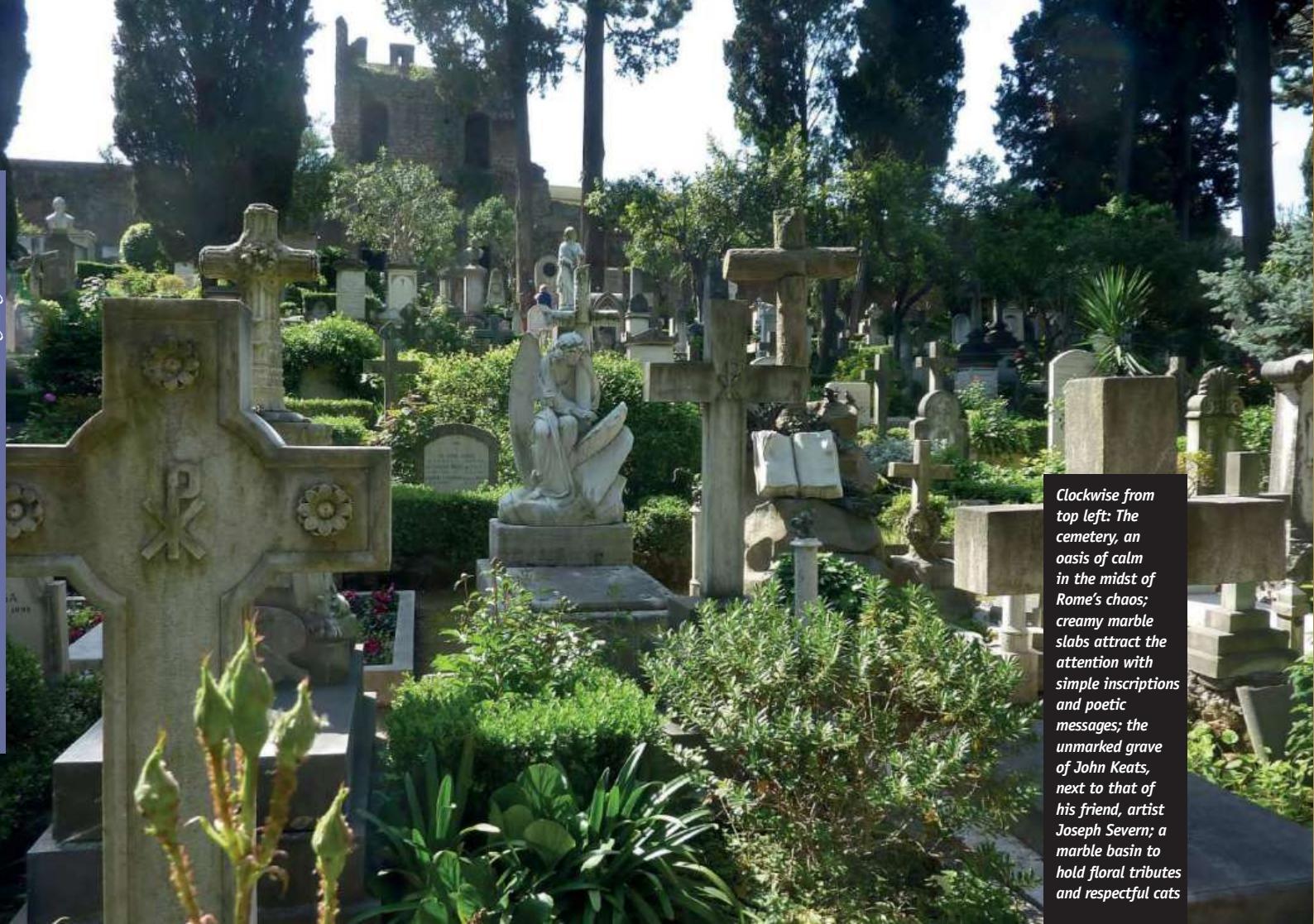


## ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.



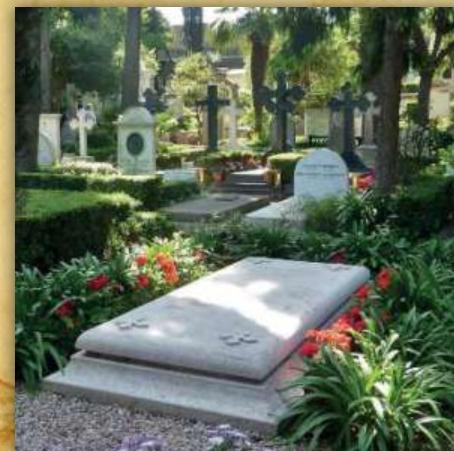
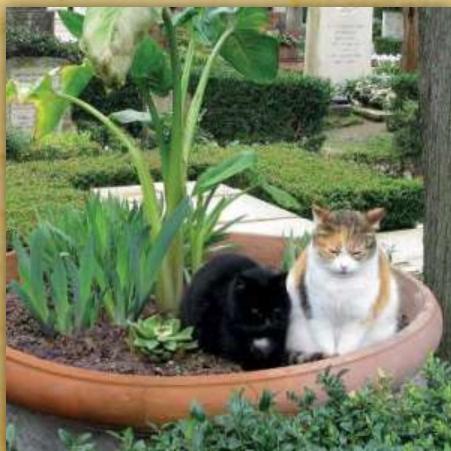
*The Palazzo degli Ambasciatori*



*Clockwise from top left: The cemetery, an oasis of calm in the midst of Rome's chaos; creamy marble slabs attract the attention with simple inscriptions and poetic messages; the unmarked grave of John Keats, next to that of his friend, artist Joseph Severn; a marble basin to hold floral tributes and respectful cats*

# *Famous long ago*

The non-Catholic cemetery in Rome is home to a cast of artistic luminaries through the ages. **Joe Gartman** visits the tranquil yet vibrant setting under the shadow of a pyramid...



**N**ot far from the Roman Metro station named Piramide, across Piazzale Ostiense, past the weed-strewn marble flank of an enormous pyramidal structure, and left into Via Caio Cestio, you will find yourself walking along a rather featureless stone wall. If you continue, you'll find a large stone gate in the wall marked by a small marble plaque. The plaque reads, in part:

*Campo Cestio  
L'antico Cimitero per Stranieri  
Non Cattolici*

You have found the Field of Cestius, the old cemetery for non-Catholic foreigners, also often called the Englishmen's Cemetery.

Once inside, the chaos of modern Rome is silenced and stilled. Perhaps you will hear a gentle sighing as the breeze sways the tall cypresses, or the more ragged note of the occasional pine or palm tree. There may be other visitors along the shaded pathways, but the slow crunch of their footsteps will soon hesitate and stop, for there is much to arrest the visitor's attention: a familiar name on a gravestone, perhaps, or a sentiment expressed in marble poetry. There is no uniformity in the monuments: a stone angel weeps over a tomb, wings draped over the sides in sorrow, while atop another monument an angel of resurrection stands with wings spread in triumph. There are plain stones with simple inscriptions; statues, and elaborate scrollwork; and marble basins to hold flowers, moss, or cats.

Some of the myriad cats of Rome make themselves at home here.

No doubt these are non-Catholic, as required by the property's covenants, but probably not pagan. There is a feline sanctuary near the cemetery, so the cats of Campo Cestio are mostly sleek and well-fed.

#### SOFTENING THE STONES

If you go in spring or summer, flowers of many kinds will flourish on and between the graves – primroses, daisies, roses – softening the stones, celebrating rebirth and the hopeful changing of seasons. Even in winter, shrubs survive along the pathways.

Painters, sculptors, poets and others of a creative temperament have for centuries flocked to Rome, filling the city with *stranieri* – foreigners – through the ages. But the problem of where to bury non-Catholics when they died didn't become crucial until the age of the European Grand Tours undertaken by upper-class youths from Britain and

Protestant northern Europe. From the late 17th century and into the 19th, these visitors brought home stories of sunny, warm Italy and the glorious Roman monuments of antiquity. Ever since, northern Europeans and Americans have sought the comforting warmth, both of weather and culture, and inspiration from the ancients.

*O for a beaker full of the warm south,  
Full of the true, the blushing Hippocrene*

Although he knew the Hippocrene was a well on Mount Helicon in Greece, whose waters provided poetic inspiration, in his hour of crisis the author of those lines came to Rome instead, as we shall see. Many others came to stay and die there. And since in Rome under the Papacy non-Catholics could not be buried in consecrated ground, a plot of church-owned land near the ancient town walls was designated as the last resting place for those not of the faith. George Langton, a



*A stone angel weeps over a tomb, wings draped over the sides in sorrow*

British aristocrat, was the first person known to have been buried there, in 1738. George may have been the first person buried in the plot of land designated by the Pope for non-Catholic foreigners. But someone else was buried so closely nearby, and so memorably marked is his grave, that I must give him pride of place. He too was not a Catholic, but he was no foreigner.

During the reign of Caesar Augustus, in about 18BC, a man named Gaius Cestius died in Rome. Gaius was a magistrate and a Tribune of the Plebs. Since burials were not allowed within the city in those times, his will specified that a mausoleum in the shape of a pyramid be built for him on a plot of land he owned outside the city boundary.

Gaius may have served in the Roman military and seen pyramids on campaigns in Nubia (present-day Sudan). The Nubian pyramids were steeper, narrower and younger than the ancient pyramids in Giza, but many were a few centuries old by the time Gaius Cestius encountered them.

To ensure that his memory would last forever, his heir caused an inscription to be carved on the pyramid:

*Gaius Cestius, son of Lucius, of the gens Pobilia, member of the College of Epulones, praetor, tribune of the plebs, septemvir of the Epulones*

Another inscription credits the heir and the builders for having completed the work in a lightning-fast 330 days.

#### IGNOMINIOUS TRANSFORMATION

No doubt visitors were suitably impressed for the next couple of centuries, during the Pax Romana, but Gaius' monument suffered an ignominious transformation in the third century AD, when German barbarian tribes began to be a serious threat. Ominous events such as the Roman Army's defeat by the invaders at the battle of Placentia, caused the Emperor Aurelian to order a new defensive wall to be built around the city. The government was running a bit of a deficit in those days, so to save money several existing structures were incorporated into the new wall. Cestius' pyramid became a bastion, part of Rome's defensive perimeter.

Part of the wall was destroyed in the sixth century AD during the struggle between the Ostrogoths and Justinian's

Eastern Roman Empire over control of the peninsula. In 546, with a temporary advantage over Justinian's general Belisarius, the Ostrogoth leader Totila ordered the wall demolished. However, more than two-thirds of the walls survived. It marked the boundary of the city of Rome until the 19th century. As the centuries passed and the Western Roman Empire faded into history, the origins of the pyramid were forgotten. The inscription remained, but the medieval inhabitants of Rome called the pyramid *meta remi*, Tomb of Remus, after the twin brother of Rome's legendary founder, Romulus.

In fact, there was another pyramid near the Vatican that was known as the Tomb of Romulus. That monument, of unknown origin, was demolished in the 16th century and its marble sheathing probably put to use in church building. Cestius' pyramid survived, though, mainly because it

► was part of Aurelian's wall. It still is. A section of wall near the Porta Ostiensis intersects the pyramid and forms one side of the cemetery's enclosure. The pyramid was excavated in the late 17th century. The weeds were stripped from the sides. The burial chamber was opened, and the workmen found frescoed decoration on the walls, but nothing else. Sometime, presumably in antiquity, the tomb had been looted. Even the frescoes are now faint and faded, and Gaius' bones probably long since dust.

The pyramid towers above the cemetery. Even the cypresses are not so tall, yet it is the lives and stories marked by the smaller stones that touch our hearts most closely. The giant pyramid tells of a powerful and wealthy man, whose monument celebrates a successful life much admired by his fellows. And, too, Cestius' mausoleum does not completely share the peace and tranquility of the cemetery with the other graves, as the pyramid is exposed on one side to the clamour and chaos of modern Rome.

#### FLEETING FAME

There are monuments to famous people here, too, although for some the fame was fleeting. A 1950s actress, Belinda Lee, is one. Gregory Corso, an American poet identified with the 'beat' generation, and an admirer of Shelley, is buried near his hero, as he wished. August von Goethe has a headstone placed by his father, the great German poet and playwright Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, that is marked simply *Goethe filius*. Antonio Gramsci, founder of the Italian Communist Party, rests here. There are memorials to painters, sculptors, scientists and poets who were people of note in their times but who are now remembered chiefly by scholars of their fields.

The grave of Rosa Bathurst has a long inscription mourning her death, expressing the grief of her mother both for Rosa's passing but, curiously, also the mysterious disappearance of Rosa's father "on a mission to Vienna". Benjamin Bathurst was lost at the age of 26. Rosa, who was widely admired by the British contingent in Rome for her beauty and charm, was thrown from her horse into the Tiber River and drowned. Stendhal wrote of her death in his diary. She was 16 years old. "If thou art young and lovely, build not thereon", the inscription warns.

There are others here whose fame was more enduring. Percy Bysshe Shelley is buried here. So is his three-year-old son William. Shelley and his wife Mary

Wollstonecraft knew the place too well, but, like many others, seemed to find solace in its peace and beauty. In the preface to his *Adonais*, the great elegy written to honour John Keats, Shelley recounted that he visited the younger poet's grave:

*"... in the lonely and romantic cemetery of the Protestants in that city, and under the pyramid which is the tomb of Cestius ... It might make one in love with death to think that one might be buried in so sweet a place"*

The ironic prescience of these words is startling. Little more than a year after he began writing *Adonais*, Shelley, sailing his own craft from Livorno to Lerici, was caught in a storm and drowned when his boat capsized. He was cremated on the beach at Viareggio by his friends, including Byron and the adventurer Edward John Trelawny. According to tradition, Trelawny snatched his heart from the flames and gave it to



*John Keats rests under an epitaph for someone unnamed. But he is not forgotten*

Mary Shelley, and after her death it was found among her possessions, wrapped in a page from *Adonais*. Shelley's ashes, however, were eventually buried in the Protestant Cemetery, his gravestone bearing a quotation from *The Tempest*:

*Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange*

Beauty, love, fame, death and poetry – these were the preoccupations of perhaps the most famous person to be buried within the cemetery walls. John Keats, the poet who yearned for the true and blushing Hippocrene, did indeed come to Rome seeking something as precious as inspiration – his health. He was a victim of tuberculosis, a disease that

took his mother when he was 14 years old, and eventually all three of his brothers. Keats had nursed his brother Tom Keats during the last months of Tom's life, and possibly contracted the disease by doing so.

#### FEROCIOUS CONDEMNATION

Keats came to Rome with a friend, Joseph Severn, a painter. He left behind in England a literary career that had early suffered ferocious condemnation but that also had influential supporters, and which would, after his death, make him one of the most loved poets in the English language. He also left behind in England his fiancée, Fanny Brawne, a young woman with whom he had a passionate and troubled romance. Their relationship was probably complicated by Keats' knowledge, according to his friend Charles Armitage Brown, that he was fated to die young. Keats wrote in 1818:

*When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain*

The sonnet continues as he laments the work he knows he will never complete. Then, at last, the subject becomes love:

*And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,  
That I shall never look upon thee more...*

*Then on the shore  
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink*

John Keats died in February 1821, aged 25, in an apartment overlooking the Spanish Steps. Although love and fame may have been nothingness, he evidently felt anguish for the unrealised poetry of which he knew he was capable, and for the recognition he

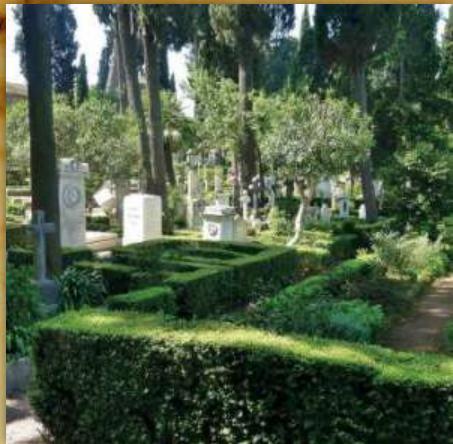
knew he deserved. He couldn't have known that his words would still touch people's hearts 200 years later. He told Severn that his gravestone should contain only these words:

*Here lies one whose name was writ in water*

Although Severn (buried next to Keats many years later) could not resist including a few words of explanation, nonetheless John Keats rests under an epitaph for someone unnamed. But he is not forgotten.

The great Gaius Cestius was forgotten for over 1,000 years, until a 17th-century Pope excavated his tomb. When, in time, the small stone above Keats' grave falls and its inscription is eroded away by the rain, nothing will be lost. But will a poet's name, written in water, survive 2,000 years? Shakespeare was confident in his own poetry; perhaps he can speak for another poet too:

*Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme* ®



*This page, clockwise from top left: Graves nestle among lofty cypress trees; the pyramid towers over the cemetery; the tomb of Percy Bysshe Shelley; the Angel of Grief, created by sculptor William Wetmore Story in 1894; the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, monument to the Roman magistrate; box hedges line the dusty pathways; directions to two of the cemetery's more famous residents. Opposite: The Porta San Paola, near the pyramid and home to a small museum*



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ROME IS AWASH IN FOUNTAINS. There are giant fountains, like the Trevi with its cascades of water and a basin carpeted with coins. There are fountains shaped like bee-covered seashells, like sunken boats, soup tureens, and pine cones. You might find a fountain topped with a stack of cannonballs, or with turtles, or stony but sensuous naiads. And on many streets and squares, often near an outdoor market, you will find a humble little fountain, just a curved pipe set in a cast iron post, continually running. You can safely drink from it despite the litter that inevitably collects around the drain. Just stop the downward stream with a finger, and a jet of water will spritz your shirt from a hole just where the pipe bends down. This clever little design element has been created for your convenience in drinking.

These are the *nasoni*, “big noses”, of Rome. And while they may not evoke the grandeur of the city, like the Colosseum or Marcus Aurelius on his horse, they are nevertheless a well-loved symbol of the city. Each of the stubby posts is emblazoned with the city’s motto, SPQR, *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, “The Senate and the People of Rome”.

# Running noses in Rome

*On many streets and squares you will find a humble little fountain, just a curved pipe set in a cast iron post, continually running*

In ancient times, Rome was famous for its never-ending, always flowing, fresh water supply. For centuries, Romans enjoyed their fountains, elaborate public baths, and even mock sea-battles in the flooded Colosseum. From senators to shopkeepers to slaves, Romans did not lack for water. The fact that, within the city, water was distributed by a system of lead pipes has led some to speculate that the ancients suffered from slow lead-poisoning. But, because the water flowed continuously, it never sat in the pipes for long and probably wasn’t seriously contaminated. The constant flow of water also flushed the city’s sewers, making the city much more hygienic than it would otherwise have been.

Rome’s water supply was severely damaged by the Barbarian invasions that brought down the Western Roman Empire and it was not until after the Renaissance that a series of Popes began restoring and replacing the aqueducts and plentiful water returned to the city. Magnificent fountains, many in the Baroque style, celebrated these achievements. But to bring water closer to the people, hundreds of smaller fountains, usually troughs supplied by a spigot or two, were installed in Roman neighbourhoods. The troughs, often recycled ancient sarcophagi, were convenient for horses as well as people.

By the 1870s, the price of empty sarcophagi seems to have increased, for the city administration began to install the cheaper *nasoni*. The humble metal posts with the big noses now number around 2,500. They’re popular with dogs and pigeons, which drink from the end of the pipe. You may see a tourist, bent double, trying to do the same, but of course, you and I do not; we know the secret. And we don’t carry water bottles, either. We just follow our *nasoni*.



## ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.

# Cinecittà calling

Ever wanted to see Rome, and also take in Assisi and Manhattan – all in the space of one day? There is one way of achieving such an apparently impossible feat. **Marc Zakian** takes the underground out to Cinecittà...

Last stop but one on the Rome underground line is Cinecittà. This is Cinema City: not a simple Hollywood, or a lonely Pinetree, but an entire metropolis dedicated to movie magic. Twenty years ago I lived in the capital and longed to visit, but back then it was a forbidden city where only the chosen entered. Two decades later I am stepping out of the metro at the distinctly non-showbiz tube stop bearing Cinecittà's name, and heading through the main entrance. The studios now welcome paying visitors, and I join a group of film fans eager to discover the secrets of Rome's 'Hollywood on the Tiber'.

Cinecittà's main square features a sedate green lawn shaded by umbrella pines and enclosed by mustard coloured walls. I was expecting to be greeted by a riot of clapper boards, costumed extras, pampered stars and screaming producers. But now we mortals are allowed through the front door, while the talent comes in round the back.

Our guide, Roberta, ushers us onto the back lot. We are on 'Broadway': four streets built in 2002 for the film *Gangs of New York* – and left here as a permanent legacy. This is Manhattan in the 1850s, with gas lamps, shops and houses – I peek behind the doors in search of fast-talking New Yorkers, but the only residents are noonday lizards basking in the grass.

Left off 'Broadway' is the Roman forum. Here is Caesar's city, but not as you know it (if you want the real one, it's four miles down the road). For years my route to work took me past the bleached white marble ruins of the ancient Roman capital. But this is the imperial city as the

*Medieval stage set of Assisi*





*The Rome stage set has colour lacking in the ancient original*



*The Rome set was built for the BBC*

builders left it: the temple of Venus with its bright-red columns waiting for a Nero to stride between them; a pristine green victory god ready to fly from its column.

There are five acres of the ancient capital reconstructed here in deliciously crafted detail. This is what Cinecittà is famous for: widescreen toga-epics bankrolled by the Hollywood money which flowed up the Tiber during the 1960s – the days when old school screen stars were seduced by the sunshine and pasta lifestyle. Richard Burton met Elizabeth Taylor for *Anthony and Cleopatra* at Cinecittà; during the filming of the most expensive film in history they fell in love and – as both were already married – caused an international scandal.

*Now we mortals are allowed through the front door*

"This is where I would like to have lived," Roberta announces, pointing to an arcaded building with statues and grand columns. "In the patrician villa. As a Roman aristocrat. But of course I would most probably have been over here." She leads us along the 'via Appia' and we are in Suburra, the world's first suburbs. With my grasp on reality beginning to slip, I give the temple of Venus a quick knock and a hollow plaster sound assures me that this is all part of the business of show.

But despite my reality check, any sense of geography and time flies out of one of the many false studio windows that surround us: in a corner of 'Rome' is an ancient



► Egyptian Temple; beyond is a replica of the St Peter's balcony; past this is a Renaissance street which leads us back to a medieval town. And not just any medieval town: here is a perfect replica of Assisi from the 1100s, created in a hurry for a drama about St Francis. Rome may not have been built in a day, but Cinecittà's Assisi was constructed in a plaster and fibreglass flurry of 15 days.

As we walk on a figure of Christ greets us. The statue, which was flown over Rome by helicopter for the opening sequence of *La Dolce Vita*, is part of a collection of divinely crafted props made by the Di Anglis family. Adriano, the third generation master prop maker, pokes his head out from the jumble of movie treasures and invites us in.

*The imposing concrete studio is the largest ever built in Europe*

The interior resembles a museum rather than model-maker's workshop. "These were the dolphins on the *Ben-Hur* chariot," he explains. "Here is our life-size reproduction of Michelangelo's David, and this... this I can't remember what it was for. My father made it," he recalls, nostalgically pointing to a giant Pharaoh.

We finish at Sound Stage 5, the spiritual home of Cinecittà's maestro, Federico Fellini. Most of the director's films were shot here, and the imposing 1930s concrete studio is the largest ever built in Europe. Fellini loved the studios; he worked, slept and ate there. And when he died, people paid their respects at his coffin in Studio 5.

*Sculpture in the main square*

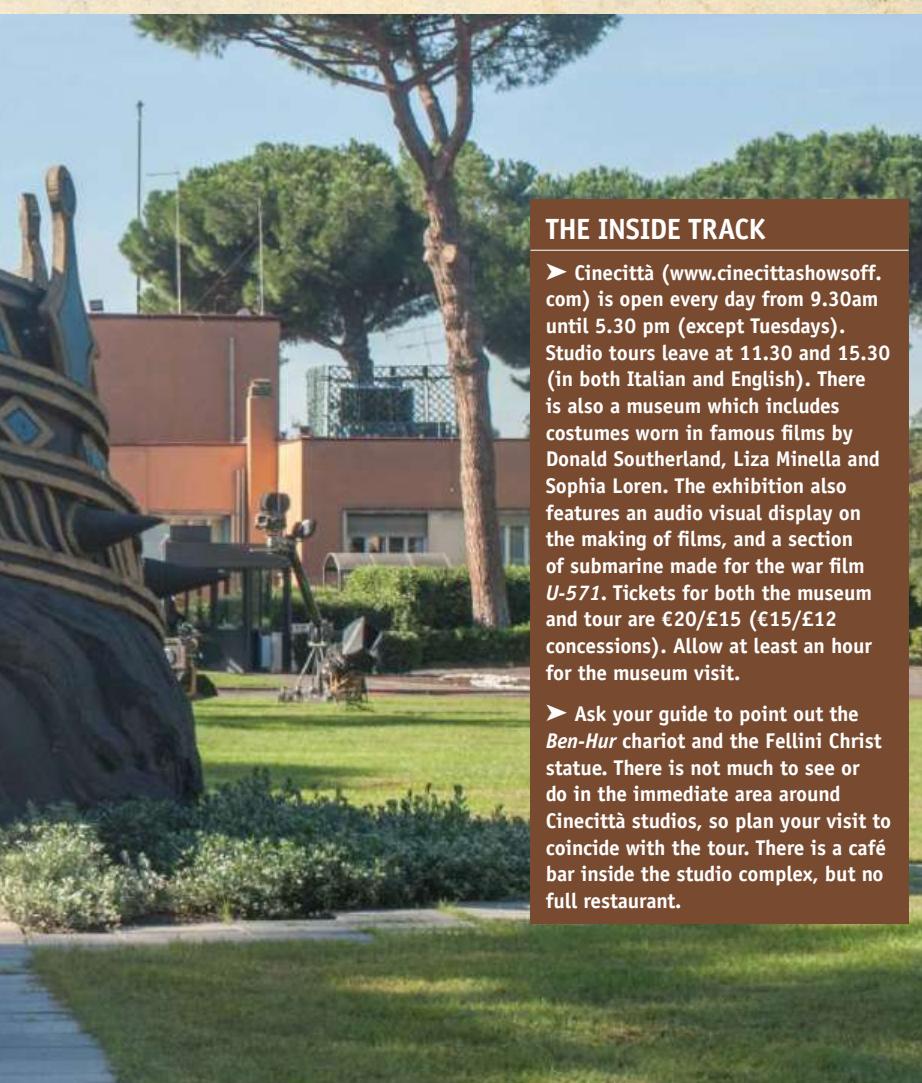




Christ statue from *La Dolce Vita*



This set appeared as Pompeii in *Dr Who*



### THE INSIDE TRACK

► Cinecittà ([www.cinecittashowoff.com](http://www.cinecittashowoff.com)) is open every day from 9.30am until 5.30 pm (except Tuesdays). Studio tours leave at 11.30 and 15.30 (in both Italian and English). There is also a museum which includes costumes worn in famous films by Donald Southerland, Liza Minella and Sophia Loren. The exhibition also features an audio visual display on the making of films, and a section of submarine made for the war film *U-571*. Tickets for both the museum and tour are €20/€15 (€15/€12 concessions). Allow at least an hour for the museum visit.

► Ask your guide to point out the *Ben-Hur* chariot and the Fellini Christ statue. There is not much to see or do in the immediate area around Cinecittà studios, so plan your visit to coincide with the tour. There is a café bar inside the studio complex, but no full restaurant.

Carole André-Smith acted for Fellini. "The director was friendly with my mother," she tells me. "He was making *Satyricon* and had to shoot a scene where two boys kiss each other. It was 1969, Italy was much more conservative then, and the Maestro felt it would be easier to use a boy and a girl. So there I was, age 15 dressed up as a boy. A woman watching the filming said to my mother 'What a handsome son you have.'"

"I first came here as a very young girl. My French-American mother played foreign roles in Italian films and she would bring me on set. I was always happy at Cinecittà. It felt like I was in another dimension, where crazy things were normal."

"The dressing rooms were enormous areas of exciting activity. I would walk past each studio, enchanted by the music and bustle. Outside the wardrobe area they were dying costumes with tea bags then hanging them out in the sun to dry. It was a place of contrasts: over here was a naked woman, over there Holy Jerusalem. When Mel Gibson made *The Passion of the Christ* at Cinecittà there were thousands of olive trees everywhere. It was magical."

"One of my favourite actors was Marcello Mastroianni. He was my 'protector' in a film called *Dirty Weekend*. There is a scene where Oliver Reed had to push himself on me. It was very violent, and when Mastroianni saw I was scared he stopped the filming."

Carole is still working at Cinecittà, in charge of the studio's PR. "We make a lot of TV now," she explains. "BBC/HBO filmed the series *Rome* here in 2007, leaving us the legacy of their marvelous set. The BBC reused it in 2008 for an episode of *Doctor Who* located in ancient



Ancient Roman forum

## GETTING THERE

- British Airways offers daily flights from Heathrow and Gatwick to Rome Fiumicino from £90 return.
- To get to Cinecittà itself, take the Underground Line A from the centre of Rome in the direction of Anagnina. Metro tickets €1.50/£1.20. Get off at Cinecittà and you will see the studios as you exit the station.

► Pompeii. We have even been the home to the Italian *Grande Fratello* (Big Brother). But my hope is that a 'new Fellini' will come here and bring the cinematic magic back to Cinecittà."

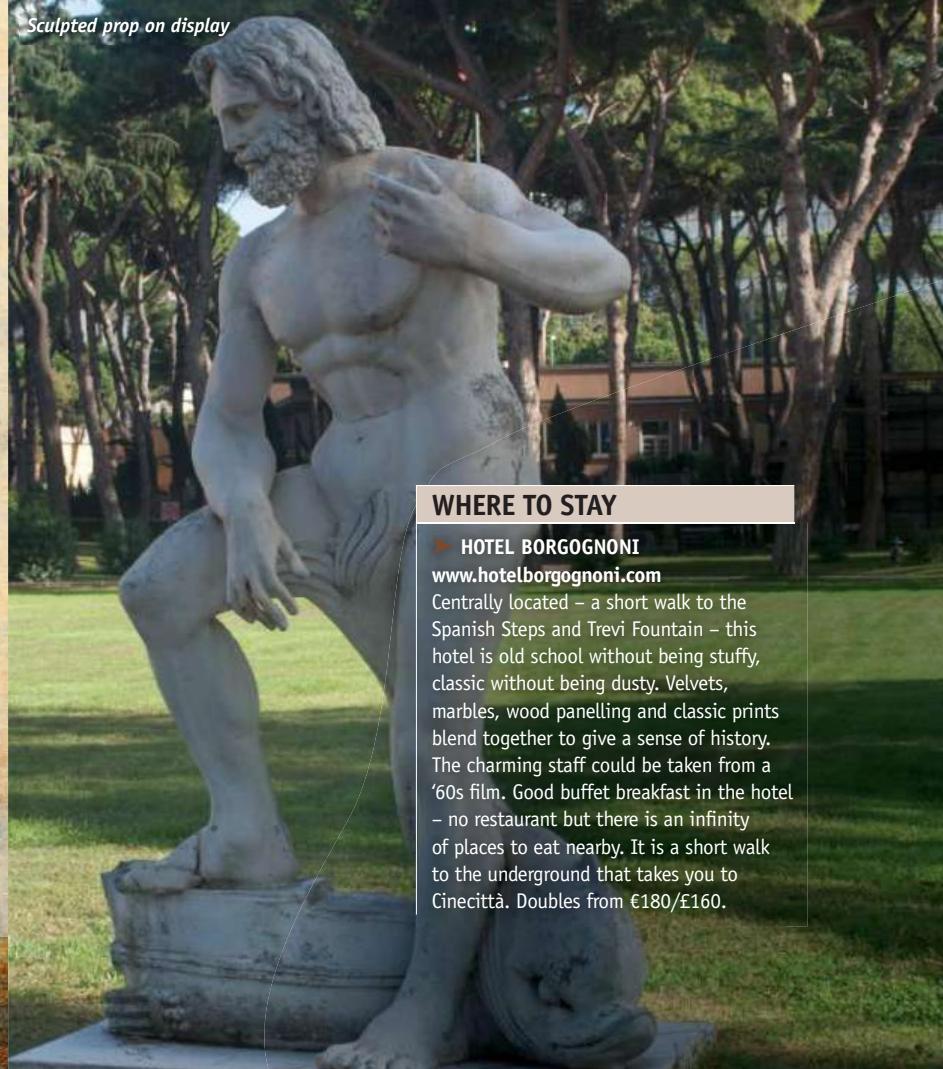
I decide to pay homage to the original Fellini and head to the city centre – to the fountain that was built by a Pope and made famous by a film (and a song). In *La Dolce Vita* Marcello Mastroianni is tempted to wade into the waters of the Trevi Fountain by the siren Anita Ekberg – nobody sees them splashing about, except for a kitten, which Ekberg balances on her head.

When I arrive in a packed Trevi Square there's no room to swing a Fellini kitten. Legend says that if you throw a

*Polaroid photographers try to sell pictures to a digital generation*

coin in the fountain you will return to Rome. But most people can't get close to the waters so they launch their coins over the masses below: euros, dimes and pennies whistling perilously past the heads of tourists, startling the thirsty pigeons perched on the monument. Polaroid photographers try to sell their instant pictures to a digital generation, while a local down-and-out plucks a living from the fountain's riches with a magnet on a stick. A policeman who should stop him from raiding the Trevi's booty chats on his mobile.

If Fellini were alive today, he would love every moment. Rome is pure cinema. **R**



Sculpted prop on display

## WHERE TO STAY

- HOTEL BORGOGNONI

[www.hotelborgognoni.com](http://www.hotelborgognoni.com)

Centrally located – a short walk to the Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain – this hotel is old school without being stuffy, classic without being dusty. Velvets, marbles, wood paneling and classic prints blend together to give a sense of history. The charming staff could be taken from a '60s film. Good buffet breakfast in the hotel – no restaurant but there is an infinity of places to eat nearby. It is a short walk to the underground that takes you to Cinecittà. Doubles from €180/£160.



ONE OF THE PRICELESS JEWELS in the sparkling crown of Rome is the Villa Farnesina. It bears the name of its second owner, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who bought it in 1580. However, the splendid mansion in Trastevere was built and decorated by the fabulously wealthy Sienese merchant banker Agostino Chigi. Agostino was one of the wealthiest men in Rome during the first 20 years of the 1500s. He was in the closest circle of a string of popes, working as treasurer, notary or confidant for Alexander VI (Borgia) to Pope Leo X (Medici). Agostino not only called his illegitimate son Lorenzo Leone after the Medici pope, he had Leo perform the rites of baptism too. He was daring, extravagant, cunning and a lover of art and all things beautiful. He commissioned his fellow Sienese architect, Baldassare Peruzzi, who had trained under Bramante, to build his residence. After consulting astrologers for the most auspicious date to commence construction, it was decided that April 21 would bring the greatest fortune. This is also the supposed date that Rome was founded.

Agostino created a new type of dwelling, a hybrid of the country villa and the urban palazzo. He had his permanent city residence built on the other side of the river from the others, in the

# The Villa Farnesina in Rome

*The wall decorations have mythological scenes, most notably a beautiful scene of Galatea by Raphael skimming the sea on her dolphin-motored hovercraft*

undesirable working class area of Trastevere, outside the city walls. His mansion had its entrance onto the Tiber with splendid gardens surrounding the structure. Here, he combined the privacy of the country retreat with his daily business and urban entertainment. He lived here with the two great loves of his life, the famous courtesan Imperia, with whom he had a daughter, Lucrezia, and then with his beautiful Venetian girlfriend from humble origins, Francesca Ordeaschi, who bore him four children and whom he eventually married.

In one of the ground-floor rooms, the delightful ceiling frescoes depict the position of the planets at Agostino's birth. The wall decorations of this same room have mythological scenes, most notably a beautiful scene of Galatea by Raphael skimming the sea on her dolphin-motored hovercraft. Next door is the most beautiful room of the house, and one of the most exquisite decorative scenes in this period, the Loggia of Cupid and Psyche. Used for banquets, performances and parties, this room communicates directly with the landscaped luscious gardens outside. It is executed circa 1517 by the workshop of Raphael (some of the greatest painters of the time – Giulio Romano, Giovanni da Udine and Raffaellino del Colle).

The ceiling is decorated with a plethora of vegetables, fruits and flowers which link the interior space to the exterior. The scenes in the spandrels and on the ceiling tell the love story of Cupid and Psyche, which culminates in their wedding banquet, and Cupid before the gods of Olympia, the two large rectangular scenes in the middle of the ceiling. This subject matter was of great interest in the Renaissance as *psyche* means 'soul' in Greek and so the philosophical significance of the two lovers was the union of body and soul. It represented mankind's newly regained self-awareness and control.

Moreover, this scene also had strong personal significance for Agostino and Francesca, as Psyche was raised from mere mortal status to goddess by the gods when reunited with her love, Cupid. Being from opposite ends of the spectrum of society, Agostino and Francesca's union was in theory unsuitable and socially unacceptable. But their mutual love transcended all adversity and they lived as companions and then spouses in society like any others. The gods, or, in Agostino's case, the Pope, not only accepted their union, he actually performed the marriage rite and enjoyed the banquet afterwards! ®



Within the Villa Farnesina with Galatea (below)



## ABOUT THE WRITER

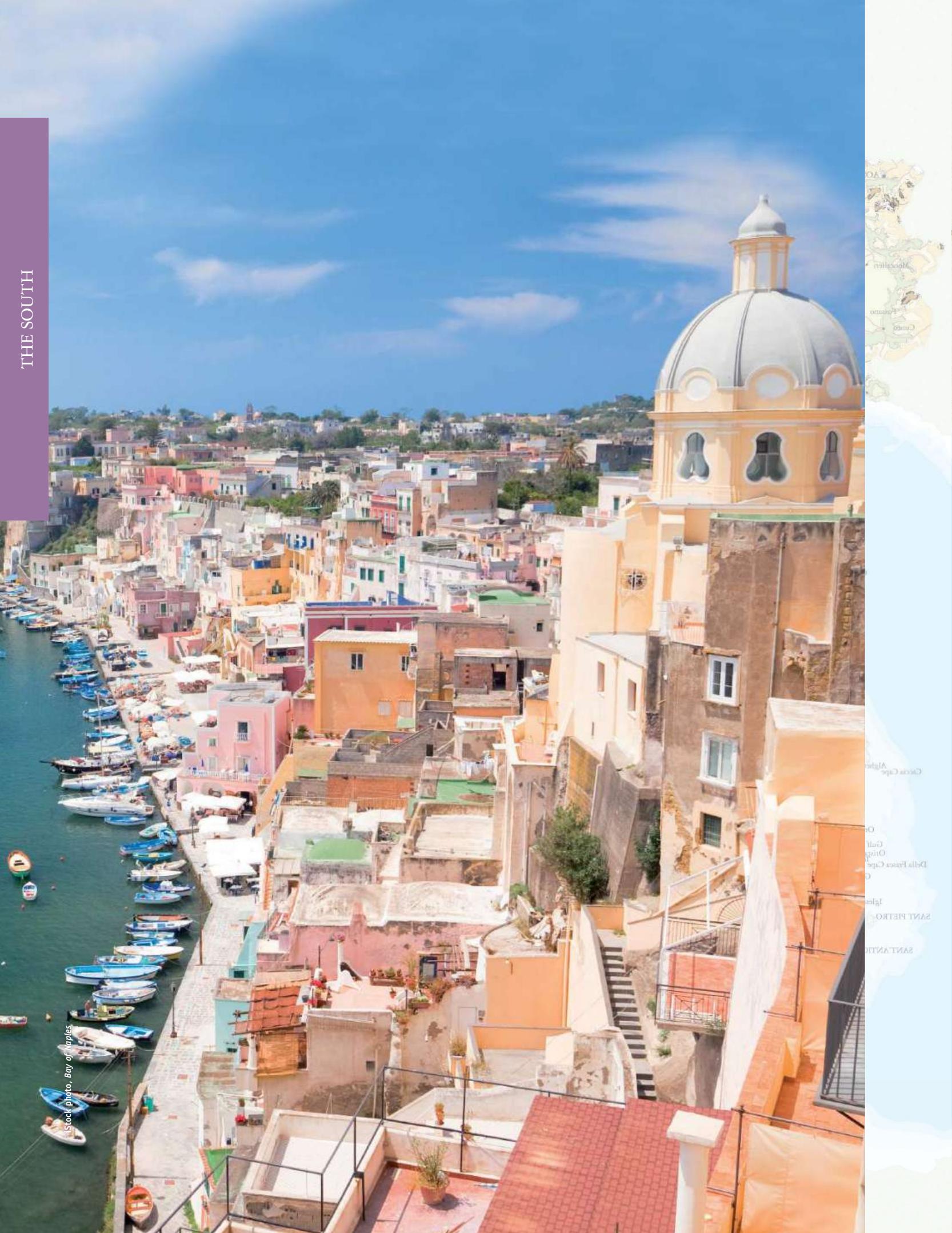
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# SANTA MARIA, TRASTEVERE

This **ceiling detail** in Rome's Basilica of Our Lady in Trastevere – perhaps the first church in which Mass was openly celebrated – would appear painted, such is its intricacy, yet it is not...

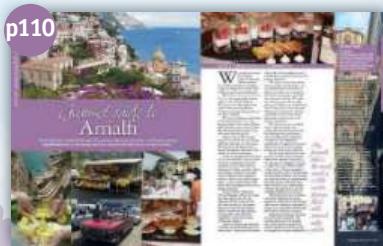
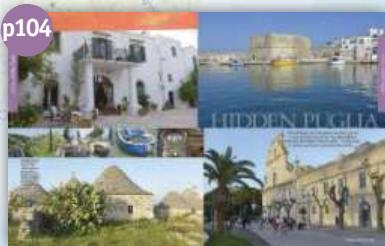
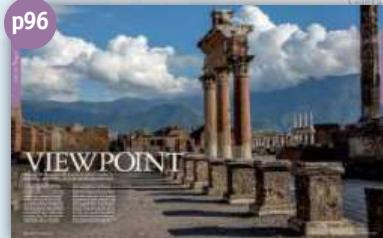
**T**he Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere has a rich history that dates back to the 4th century and was the first church in Rome to be dedicated to the Madonna. One of the most notable aspects of this feat of architecture is the gilded wooden ceiling covered in glowing golden mosaics that are so intricately detailed you would think they were paintings rather than perfect assemblages of tiny pieces of gold, glass and stone. Visitors can witness the *Assumption of the Virgin*, created in 1616 by Domenichino, and a 12th-century mosaic of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. This ceiling is such a work of art that many visitors have reported making more than one trip to the Basilica just to view it in all its splendour again. 





# SOUTH ITALY

Beyond Lazio you'll find more incredible holiday destinations, so we explore the big and small attractions in the south of Italy, from Naples and Sorrento to Puglia and Basilicata...





# On the road in Italy's unexplored south

For a honeymoon with a difference, **Hannah Millbank** and her husband, Ben, took to the roads to discover a slice of the real Italy...



*Clockwise from top left: Hannah cycling in Italy; the stunning landscape; gazing at suburbia on day three of the trip; enjoying a gelato; a visit to the buffalo farm; driving on to the next destination*

**I**t sounded like the ultimate cliché. With shining wedding bands, a slight hangover from the biggest party of our lives, and those goofy smiles that only newly-weds wear, we were honeymooning in what is arguably the world's most romantic country. But, we were determined that this trip would be anything but typical.

Instead of jostling with the crowds, we took to the Italian roads and drove away from the undeniable excitement of Rome. With the freedom of our own car, we were determined to get under the skin of Italy, exploring otherwise hard to reach nooks and crannies. We were headed for Abruzzo's dramatic Apennine Mountains, the rolling plains and meandering coastline of Puglia, and the unique features of Basilicata's friendly towns. This would be an adventure to remember. Although it began in a place that time forgot.

## HILLTOP TOWN

“Nice wheels!” We’d caught the attention of a departing bus of American tourists as we pulled up – roof down, sunglasses on – at the hilltop town of Santo Stefano di



Photography © Hannah Millbank

Sessanio. Our carriage was indeed a delight to behold – a gleamingly new Mercedes E-class Cabriolet – and clearly not a typical sight in rural Italy. A far cry from our rusty old Clio back home, this was certainly the way to do things! But, despite the enthusiastic welcome, our arrival wasn’t nearly as impressive as the place we had come to explore.

Pausing each time we caught a glimpse of the surrounding snow-capped mountains, we strolled the medieval streets. Badly damaged by the 2009 earthquake, many of Santo Stefano’s buildings have been restored to their former glory. A popular bolt-hole in the summer months, we were privileged to have this sleepy village to ourselves – except for the odd local enjoying a beer in the piazza.

As dusk fell, we went in search of food. Snaking through the maze of narrow cobbled streets, we felt sure ghosts would float by at



any moment, appearing from the shadows that criss-crossed our path. Recommended by our hotel – itself a unique set-up of restored houses scattered throughout the village – we climbed the steps to Geppetto's. We didn't have high expectations – after all, we were the only guests in the village – but, so long as you

by simple yet tasty lamb kebabs, we washed our meal down with a chilled bottle of Peroni. A taste of the real Italy – now this is what we had come for.

#### THE EAST COAST

Leaving Santo Stefano's ghosts to their lofty post above, we twisted

*Alive with spring colour; it was like driving through one of Monet's vivid canvases*

don't mind rustic, we could not have been further from the truth.

Warmly greeted by a lady and her son, we were ushered into a family home. Our first Italian meal consisted of Mamma's authentic home cooking. And it was every bit as delicious as you would expect. Starting with a delicious Abruzzo speciality of lentil soup with croutons and chilli, and a dish of rich, buttery saffron ravioli, followed

back down to earth the next day. Our destination? The east coast. Warm enough to have the roof down, we hadn't expected the treat that spring had in store for our Italian adventure. Alive with colour, the land was emerging from its winter hibernation with bursts of yellow, purple and orange, dotted with bright red poppies. It was like driving through one of Monet's vivid canvases – albeit in a ➤

#### DON'T MISS

**THE ANGELS**  
You don't have to be a pilgrim to join the crowds flocking to Monte Sant'Angelo. The views alone are worth dodging the salesmen peddling endless religious knick-knacks. For those interested in more than vistas, see Santuario di San Michele, the object of much attention after the Archangel St Michael appeared here in 490 AD.

#### WHERE TO EAT

##### ► MASSERIA IL FRANTOIO

*Castella Postale, 25 – Ostuni, Puglia*

☎ +39 0831 330 276

[www.masserailfrantoio.it](http://www.masserailfrantoio.it)

Make sure you pre-book, as you won't want to miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Set in the grounds of a converted *masseria*, where nearly everything served is grown on site. The menu changes daily, and owner Armando delightfully introduces each course. The strawberry dessert we had was exquisite!

Price range

##### ► LA BETTOLA DI GEPPETTO

*Via Principe Umberto, Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Abruzzo*

Rustic, all home-cooked and cosy, this family-run eatery serves up quintessential Italian cooking at its very best. With only simple locally-sourced produce, this is authentic, down-to-earth Italian food, served in an authentic, down-to-earth dining room. Oh, and the lentil soup is really quite excellent.

Price range

##### ► RISTORANTE IL CANTUCCIO

*Via delle Beccarie, 33 – Matera, Basilicata*

☎ +39 0835 332 090

On hand to answer questions and welcome every guest, chef Michael Lella takes obvious pride in his work. Go there with an appetite and don't skip the *antipasti*, or, even better, opt for the platter option so you can sample all of Michael's delightful appetizers.

Price range

##### ► AGRITURISMO PORTA SIRENA

*Via Ponte Marmoreo, Paestum, Cappacio, Campania*

☎ +39 0828 721 035

[www.portasirena.it](http://www.portasirena.it)

Looking for proof as to why Campania is so well known for its Buffalo Mozzarella? Look no further than Porta Sirena. Deep-fried, smoked, served in a basket, served in rice balls, you'll enjoy a mozzarella feast. For *secondi*, try the buffalo steak, bursting with flavour.

Price range

##### ► RISTORANTE PIZZERIA

##### PICCOLO PARADISO

*Viale Kennedy, 29 – Peschici, Puglia*

☎ +39 0884 964 122

[www.piccoloparadisomarios.com](http://www.piccoloparadisomarios.com)

This pizzeria has one of the very finest views a restaurant can have. Wood-fired on the veranda, the pizzas were spicy, juicy and a true reminder of why Italians really are the best pizza makers.

Price range

## WHERE TO STAY

### ► SEXTANTIO ALBERGO DIFFUSO

*Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Abruzzo*

☎ +39 0862 899 112

[www.sexantio.it](http://www.sexantio.it)

Scattered around the atmospheric village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, 20 or so en-suite rooms have been restored with a beautiful balance between authenticity and luxury. Underfloor heating and low-level lighting join bare stone walls and handmade bedding, making this hotel truly unique.

**Double room from €80**

### ► PALAZZO GATTINI

*Piazza Duomo, 13/14 – Matera, Basilicata*

☎ +39 0835 334 358

[www.palazzogattini.it](http://www.palazzogattini.it)

Set on quiet Piazza Duomo, this impressive five-star hotel is a few minutes' walk from Matera's popular Piazza Vittorio Veneto. With views over Matera's ghostly *sassi*, this is a spot of cool, chic luxury. As well as the lavishly plush rooms and on-site spa for a spot of pampering, the breakfast *cornetti* are to die for.

**Deluxe rooms from €199**

### ► HOTEL DEGLI ARANCI

*Piazza Santa Maria delle Grazie, 10*

*Vieste, Puglia*

☎ +39 0884 708 557

[www.hotelaranci.it](http://www.hotelaranci.it)

A few minutes from the white cliffs of Vieste, Hotel Degli Aranci has lots of comfortable rooms, some with views out towards the sea. Complete with pool and a huge buffet breakfast, it's a great base to explore the winding streets of Vieste's old-town, or wander down to the promenade for ice cream and a spot of people watching.

**Double room from €133**

### ► CASALE GINCEASARE

*Via Gian Cesare, 8 – Cappaccio, Campania*

☎ +39 0828 728 061

[www.casale-giancesare.it](http://www.casale-giancesare.it)

Personal service at its best, this beautiful B&B is idyllically located on the edge of the Parco Nazionale del Cilento e Vallo di Diano, with views over Campania's landscape towards the Gulf of Salerno. Ten minutes drive from the ancient site of Paestum, the B&B's pool is perfect for cooling off after exploring. Antonino, the owners' son, takes pride in looking after his guests, serving home-grown *antipasti*, wine from his own vines, and breakfast on the veranda.

**Double room from €70**



## DON'T MISS

### VISIT SOME

### BUFFALOS

Filled with buffalo farms, it is no wonder Campania is famous for its fresh mozzarella. But before you sit down to tuck in, arrive a little early and work up an appetite with a tour of the farm. It's a fascinating process, which will make your mouth water.

► slightly out of place motor. This wasn't the only surprise that Italy's roads had for us however. Despite warnings about the Italian driving – "busy!", "impatient!", "fast!" – we found ourselves on virtually empty roads. Another piece of advice, however, was much more founded, and probably saved us from early divorce: investing in a European SatNav made driving a completely hassle-free way to travel. With no worries about getting lost, we were free to go where we wanted, when we wanted, stopping as we chose along the way – to take photos, grab a slice of pizza, or simply soak up the scenery. Like a childhood game of join-the-dots, we'd plotted a route booking accommodation ahead; how we got from A to B was entirely up to us.

As we reached the east coast, the Adriatic sparkled into view and we started on the coast road south. Catching the eye of a waiter

in Peschici as he scouted for early lunch takers, we took one of many unscheduled stops to enjoy our first Italian pizza. Perched at the top of the town with views over the turquoise cove below, I'm not sure if it was the location or the chef, but something made the pizza taste particularly good that day.

## ANCIENT FORESTS

Our spectacular surroundings were no surprise given we were now in the heart of the Gargano National Park, where ancient forests meet white limestone cliffs. And having our own transport meant exploring at our own pace. From our base in Vieste, a bustling seaside town, we ventured into Foresta Umbra for a day of working off some of the Italian cuisine.

Beneath the mottled shade of this ancient forest are well-marked trails for walkers and cyclists, and plenty of pretty picnic spots to



choose from – the visitors centre offers maps, bike hire and even guided hikes.

Ditching four wheels for two, we were to rely on our own pedal power for a few hours, veering off the tarmac and into the wild woods. The moderate route we selected took us on a two-hour round circuit. Passing just four people, we spotted plenty of bird life, plant life and soaring trees as our mountain bikes took us along bumpy paths into the depths of the forest.

Back in Vieste that evening,

*Like an Escher drawing, a maze of streets and staircases spiralled around each other*

we joined groups of chattering locals enjoying the late afternoon sun on the sea front. An icy glass of Prosecco in hand, we watched as glamorous well-heeled locals promenaded back and forth. Hanging precariously from the nearby clifftops, fishermen balanced on *trabucchi* – traditional wood and rope contraptions – to bring in their catch of the day. Later, as we ate a simple dish of *orecchiette*



smothered in tomato, basil and Parmesan in the perfectly located Grottino restaurant, a string of fireworks screamed up from the waterfront. We never did work out what the celebrations were for, but the fireworks' barks were definitely worse than their bites.

#### DRAMATIC ENTRANCE

As we arrived at our next stop, I have to admit I felt a little disappointed at first. Everything I'd read about Matera, a World Heritage Site, suggested a dramatic

entrance to a town on the edge – of a deep gorge that is. Our arrival was anything but dramatic, unless you count getting lost in the maze of seemingly concentric one-way systems! However, as I finally jumped out of the car to seek out our hotel by foot, I stumbled across the key reason Matera is on UNESCO's invite-only list.

Ducking under an archway in my hunt, Matera's hidden secrets ➤

#### DON'T MISS

**SHOWTIME IN SPRING**  
April and May are the perfect months for road tripping across southern Italy. Temperatures aren't too hot for car journeys, roads are quiet, spring flowers are in full bloom and the light makes for breathtaking views and photography as you drive through this beautiful landscape.

*Clockwise from top left:*  
Alberobello in Puglia; Masseria Il Frantoio; the bustling seaside town of Vieste; serene temple of Paestum, free from tourists; the happy couple; on day two, a view looking back at Santo Stefano; Hannah behind the wheel of the Mercedes





### DON'T MISS

#### THE TRULLI

No-one seems to really know the true explanation behind the *trulli*'s conical stone construction, though there are many local theories – some of which are more far-fetched than others. You'll find *trulli* scattered across Puglia's Valle d'Itria, but Alberobello is filled with over a thousand of them, creating a toy-town feel to this popular tourist attraction.

Clockwise from top left: Hannah and her husband enjoy their first taste of Italian pizza; the courtyard at Masseria Il Frantoio; lots of ancient monuments to see; Enjoying coffee like a local; the rustic accommodation



► were revealed in one of those rare moments when the term jaw-dropping isn't overkill.

A jumble of sandy coloured stone houses – known as *sassi* – appeared to tumble into a gaping gorge far below. Like an Escher drawing, a maze of streets, staircases and unruly *sassi* spiralled around each other begging me to get lost within. Bringing back memories of my childhood *Where's Wally* books, I watched people twist and turn through the scene ahead – if only Italy's fashionistas wore red and white bobble hats!

Not just a pretty picture, the *sassi* tell a haunting story of this ancient town. While restoration has turned many into boutique hotels and unique restaurants, these unusual dwellings have a less luxurious history. Natural grottoes sitting high above the gorge were the only option for many people, after Matera went from prosperity to poverty in the 1800s. Only 60 years ago, lots of families still lived in these caves, some begging for a living. It was only in the 1950s, amid publicity of how desperate life in Matera had become, that 15,000 inhabitants

were moved out of the *sassi* into government housing. Like so many tourist attractions borne out of mankind's misery, wandering through the unmissable *sassi* is a strange mixture of the fascinating and the harrowing.

### DRIVING WEST

After exploring Matera and taking day trips south to otherworldly Alberobello and Masseria Il Frantoio to enjoy perhaps the best meal of our lives, we started on the home straight. Driving west, the road wound through increasingly impressive mountains reaching up towards the descending clouds. Villages precariously laced the curves of the terrain, appearing more impossibly placed as our journey through Basilicata and into Campania continued.

Pulling up at Casale Ginceasare, our home for two nights, we were instantly pleased with ourselves for uncovering this little gem. Overlooked by jagged hills behind, this family-owned B&B presides over a colourful patchwork of farmland towards the ocean. This is a place to enjoy some relaxation. Oh, and some mozzarella; nearby buffalo



farms offer exquisitely cooked buffalo steaks and the region's famous cheese, served in every style you can imagine.

A short drive from the coast, a visit to the ancient temples of Paestum is a must. Unlike its better-

these well-preserved monuments many centuries ago.

Leaving the uncrowded sites behind us, we finally waved goodbye to southern Italy's lesser-known regions and joined the traffic snaking along the Amalfi coast. I'll

*Leaving the uncrowded sites behind, we waved goodbye to Italy's lesser-known regions*

known siblings in Rome, we shared our visit with barely another soul. Having a place like this to yourself offers an atmospheric experience you don't often get when sightseeing. Strolling by ancient baths, sitting in the ruined forum and standing beneath the dominant columns of the temples, in complete and peaceful isolation, it was easy to imagine the lives and deaths of the many people involved in building

confess now that I wasn't entirely honest when I said this trip was anything but typical. Our last few days were spent with the rest of the tourists snapping photos of Amalfi's unquestionably stunning coastline, soaking up Sorrento's sophistication, taking a whistle-stop tour of ancient Rome and eating too many *gelati* to count in the country's great capital. But who can blame us really? After all, when in Rome... **R**

## TAKING AN ITALIAN ROAD TRIP

### ► PLAN A ROUTE

Buy an Italian road map, lay it flat on your lounge floor and plot your journey. Not only will this save you time during your trip, but planning your route ensures you're not driving too long a distance in one day. It also means you can start spotting detours.

### ► BOOK AHEAD

Knowing you have a bed ready and waiting for you means there's no rush. Book hotels in advance, and let them know you may arrive late so you have the freedom to take unplanned detours en route.

### ► PACK A SATNAV

#### (WITH EUROPEAN MAPS OBVIOUSLY)

A must if you want to concentrate on exploring rather than navigating. Hire car companies offer them for a daily charge, though it can be expensive so it's worth investing in a European one – or upgrading your UK software to include European maps.

### ► TREAT YOURSELF

If you're planning on doing long journeys, book a comfortable car with plenty of space. Having a convertible was an ideal way for us to enjoy the journeys as much as the destinations.

### ► MUSIC

Sounds simple, but don't forget to update your smartphone's music library so you can listen to your favourite tracks en route to the next destination.

## FIND OUT MORE

### ► GETTING THERE

We flew to Rome from Bristol to start our adventure, for approximately £90 each return with easyJet. [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)

### ► CAR HIRE

We hired our car from Hertz' Prestige Collection. Hertz car hire: to rent a Fiat Panda or similar (Group B is the cheapest option) from 16 to 23 June costs €392 (from Rome Ciampino airport). Visit [www.hertz.co.uk](http://www.hertz.co.uk)

### ► SAT NAV SYSTEM

NeverLost, for the same period costs around €90, although varies for each trip.

### ► THE TRIP

Stopping in seven places, this trip took us 12 days. We could easily have spent more time in any of the locations we stayed, but the driving was easy, and with a soft-top car we could enjoy the sights of Italy as we travelled.



# VIEWPOINT

**Vesuvius AD 79** is the deadliest explosive volcanic eruption in recorded European history. Yet all the warning signs were there...

We now know that most earthquakes in volcanic regions are related to the subterranean movement of magma, and so the occurrence of earthquakes in those regions can be a warning of a pending eruption. We also know that in AD 62 (or perhaps in AD 63, or perhaps both – the historical record isn't actually clear) there was at least one major earthquake in the immediate area of Pompeii. But, unfortunately for them – and ironically too perhaps, given their obsession with foretelling the future – the Ancient Romans didn't make the connection

between earthquakes and volcanoes. To them, earthquakes were caused by the disgruntled rumblings of the buried giants who had been defeated by the gods in the battles that brought peace to the world; the phenomenon was entirely unrelated to fiery activity in the mountains, but rather, and in some unspecified way, to stormy weather... The writer Seneca (who says there was an earthquake in AD 63, and doesn't appear to have been aware of another one in AD 62) reproached those who evacuated the area then, fearing for the futures. And yet, in the end, it turned out they were right. **R**





*The pedestrianised sea front viewed from on high*

Long notorious for overloaded roads and crazy drivers, Naples is reclaiming its streets. With part of the sea front now closed to traffic, **Fleur Kinson** strolls blissfully across the asphalt...

**T**he first time I ever went to Naples, I saw three car crashes in two days. I half wondered if they'd been specially laid on by the tourist office to confirm one of the many colourful clichés of the city – namely, that Neapolitans drive like maniacs. You hear it all the time, don't you? "In Naples, traffic lights are just a suggestion," the tourist guide laughs, while the guidebook warns, "If you're thinking of driving in Naples, don't." Clearly, this exuberant city has a special attitude to the rules of the road. And its canny citizens seamlessly adapt to the resultant chaos.

On that initial visit, the first crash I saw left a car lying on its side in a tunnel. The traffic simply drove round it, unconcerned, and not noticeably slowing down. The second prang was just a pair of newly dented cars hastily

shunted to one side of a busy street. But my favourite was the third, a little bump I saw on the sea front. Someone clipped someone else's bumper, and the two cars drew to a halt by the pavement overlooking the water. Two male thirty-something drivers got out and languidly surveyed the damage, then they stood affably chatting and taking in the splendid sea view. I caught the tail-end of their

conversation. "So you know crazy Gianni, eh? He's my brother-in-law! Hey let's go get a coffee!" And so a

new friendship was born. In Naples, even a minor traffic accident is a social opportunity.

To be fair, in a subsequent five trips to the city, I've never seen another accident. For all Naples' legendarily insane driving, its roads are certainly not the most dangerous in Europe. (Or even in Italy. Rome's are more perilous.) But they are burdened with an exceptional

*Two male thirty-something drivers got out and languidly surveyed the damage*

number of cars. Naples reputedly has 4,700 cars per square kilometre. (London has 1,600, and Berlin 1,150.) That's a lot of vehicles, creating a lot of noise, stink and stress. Especially for pedestrians. For the explorer-on-foot, crossing the road in Naples can be an ordeal. A hundred furious bumpers immediately chivvy you out the way. Most pedestrian-crossing lights are broken, of course, and even if they aren't the cars will just speed round you as you totter out, terrified, under the illusory protection of the little green man. Every step you take across a road feels like it could be your last.

#### A VROOM! WITH A VIEW

You don't even have to cross a road for it to harass you. Walk beside a busy one for a while and its constant roar and exhaust will slowly erode all sense of calm. I was always most aware of this when strolling Naples' long, glorious sea front – surely one of the most spectacular urban waterside pavements in the world. Out across the glittering blue, one beheld the enchanted limestone



*The open road. Naples' traffic-free Via Caracciolo*



*Happy cyclists Enzo Lappone and Luigi Pannone*



*The water is so much more appealing without traffic thundering nearby*



*The displaced former gods of the sea front*



*Little beaches are coming back from the dead*



*The only cars allowed*

► chunk of Capri, the mighty rise of the Sorrento Peninsula and the brooding hulk of Vesuvius, while the foreground yielded tiny beaches and a delicious offshore castle. But could you enjoy any of it? No you couldn't. Because four lanes of fast, angry traffic thundered right beside you all the way. Thus one of Europe's most stunning spaces was squandered on a mini-motorway.

Enter Naples' new mayor, Luigi de Magistris, and his 2012 initiative, Il Lungomare Liberato ("The Liberated Sea Front"). Expanding experiments with Sunday-only traffic bans, de Magistris bravely (one might say heroically) set out to permanently re-route all motor vehicles away from the city's two loveliest kilometres of waterside and reclaim one of Naples' most magnificent spaces. Cue heavenly choir. A new age of sea front promenade has dawned; health and happiness will reign. This I had to see.

I choose a waterside hotel west of the pedestrianised stretch and excitedly emerge from it with a plan to walk east and see what happens. Traffic belches merrily past me, and I smile at all the bright seaside-detritus enlivening the



*The lure of Vesuvius, the abiding spirit of Naples*



*The sand is smartening up, and filling up*



*Vesuvius and the waterside viewed from a hotel terrace in Naples' Chiaia district*

pavement – smoky stalls selling roasted corncobs, flimsy tables of electric toys whining tinny music, big kiosks groaning under the weight of cold drinks and inflatable playthings. After half a mile I reach the spot where the cars are siphoned off inland. And suddenly, the vast four-lane thoroughfare is nothing but quiet, inviting space. I leave the pavement, electrified, and step into the road. It feels reckless, illicit.

I stride out to the very middle, and march in wonder through enormous air. The sense

of liberty is stupefying, unbelievable. I keep nervously glancing behind myself, expecting a murderous truck.

#### RECLAIMED, REBORN

It is immediately noticeable what effect the pedestrianisation has on use of the waterside. Back where the traffic still flanks the sea, there were a few hardy

sunbathers on the sea-breaker rocks, but where the cars spool away, people are suddenly everywhere – relishing the new peace and pleasure of the shoreline. Giggling toddlers paddle on the wet sand, young lovers canoodle in crevices between boulders, and mahogany-brown sun-worshippers laze in postures of abandon. Meanwhile, behind them, on what was once a thunderous thoroughfare, families

promenade with ice creams, joggers gulp lungfuls of air, and youths glide around in comical pedal-powered buggies.

Long neglected till recently, the waterside is still slightly scruffy – broken glass glints on the little spits of dark sand, and graffiti tags stain some of the big white rocks – but as more people relax here and begin to expect more from the area, it will steadily smarten up. It is traffic that has always held it back, rendering it an unloved no-man's-land. Now, not only is the shoreline more ➤



*Vesuvius and the Castel dell'Ovo seen from Mergellina at the start of the pedestrianised stretch*

► enticing, the road behind it is a new arena for games, events and concerts. The area adds a whole new leisure dimension to Naples.

Further west, where the long sea-hugging Via Caracciolo becomes Via Partenope and curves round towards the Castel dell'Ovo, I note that the elegant pavement cafés and restaurants have wasted no time in colonising the road, spreading their tables out onto the asphalt. This leisure land-grab seems an obvious physical metaphor for the more general expansion of recreation which the car-free sea front has now allowed.

#### THE BEST LAID PLANS...

But this is Naples. And it would be almost disappointing if things went smoothly. Early on, some drivers and businesses complained about 'inadequate' planning. But a much bigger challenge came in March 2013. A 19th-century palazzo collapsed on the Riviera di Chiaia – the

road running parallel to the Via Caracciolo and the chief route onto which the sea front traffic had been diverted. (Tunnelling work for a new metro line had leaked water and caused erosion. Thankfully no one was hurt.)

At the time of writing, the Riviera di Chiaia remains closed to vehicles. So guess what happens? Yep. The waterside traffic spools inland as planned, thunders back onto the sea front for a bit, then returns inland. So the pedestrianisation is rudely interrupted by a retrogressive

stretch of racetrack. And no one quite knows how or when the original conception can be resumed. How

Neapolitan! A new, carefully-plotted system is achieved and unravels almost immediately! It's as if Naples can't exist without obstacles and ad hoc routes round them. Oh well. Neapolitans excel in the unexpected and the improvised, and I have faith they'll get there in the end, one way or another. In the meantime, one suspects they rather enjoy this latest little bit of chaos. ®

*It's as if Naples can't exist without obstacles and ad hoc routes round them*

## LOVE NAPLES

*Far too many people who fly into Naples treat it as a mere transport hub. Deterred by tales of unsightly chaos, they often ignore the city altogether and hurry onward to the better-touted delights of Sorrento, Cápri or the Amalfi Coast. But spend a few days – or even hours – in Naples and you'll be helplessly beguiled. (Especially the moment you eat something. Naples has arguably the best food in Italy.) Start with these four key districts:*

### ► THE CENTRO STORICO

Abuzz with Vespas and festooned overhead with endless lines of washing, this clutch of deeply atmospheric old streets still assumes the original plan of the ancient Roman roads. Naples' cathedral is here, as are a thousand colourful details of Neapolitan street life.

### ► VIA TOLEDO AND THE QUARTIERI SPAGNOLI

Naples' great glossy shopping artery runs adjacent to a dense network of the city's narrowest and most populous domestic alleys. The 'Spanish Quarter' might be poor and ramshackle, but it is richly textured and strangely beautiful. Note that it's no longer the byword for crime it once was.

### ► CHIAIA ("KEY-EYE-A")

Affluent and arty, elegant and interesting, Chiaia is many visitors' favourite part of Naples. Designer boutiques sit beside quirky junkshops, and café tables nestle between bursts of greenery. Chiaia is also where you'll find the pedestrianised stretch of sea front of which I speak so highly.

### ► VOMERO

Enjoyably reached by funicular railway, well-heeled Vomero sits serenely above the rest of the city. The vistas it affords are unforgettable. Walk the ramparts of the Castel Sant'Elmo or the terraced gardens of the Certosa di San Martino for heart-stopping views over Naples and its peerless bay.



*Sign of new times*

## GETTING THERE

### ► BY PLANE

Italy's third largest city, Naples is well-served by direct flights from the UK and Ireland. You can fly direct from Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, London Gatwick, London Luton, London Stansted, Manchester or Newcastle, carried by BA, easyJet, Meridiana, Monarch, Thomson or Aer Lingus. Flight time is roughly two and a half hours. Naples Capodichino Airport is only a few miles north of the centre as the crow flies; a bus or taxi takes 20-30 minutes.

### ► BY TRAIN

Naples is on Italy's mainline rail network, and fast trains from Rome take two hours. There are many intercity trains taking a continuous route from Bologna to Florence to Rome to Naples, with a total journey time of about five hours. The area around Napoli Centrale station is possibly the worst introduction to the city – chaotic, traffic-choked and hideous. Do not despair! The station is only a few hundred yards from the start of the fascinating *centro storico*. Keep going.



*Overseeing the revival of urban beaches*



*Via Partenope, where cafés encroach onto the asphalt*



*Enjoying the seaside rocks, no longer bedevilled by an adjacent mini-motorway*



*Clockwise from top left: Masseria Il Frantoio; 16th-century castle and Porto Vecchio at Monopoli; il Duomo Vecchio in Molfetta; unrestored trulli in the Istriano Valley; landscape of Gravina in Puglia; at the Masseria Il Frantoio; boat at Molfetta; the Baroque rebuild of Madonna della Madia at Monopoli*





# HIDDEN PUGLIA

Think of Puglia and most people see *trulli*, but this is just the beginning of the story. **Jane Gifford** discovers that Puglia is like an oyster – to fully enjoy its charms, you have to go beyond the obvious...



Photography © Jane Gifford



**C**ompared to the rest of Italy, Puglia is mostly flat. It's a region of exposed coastal plains with a relatively featureless limestone plateau in the middle, the Murge. Being wide open to the Adriatic Sea on one side and the Ionian Sea on the other, Puglia has often been invaded, so its people have closed in on themselves, sheltering behind high, windowless walls and finding sanctuary in caves.

To best explore, fly to Bari, rather than the usual Brindisi, and begin by heading southwest to Conversano, 40km away. Follow the smaller roads through a riot of wildflowers where *ferovia* cherry orchards stretch off to the horizon. These juicy, red cherries are a local speciality, all apparently originating from a single pit which took root near the railway at Sammichele di Bari in the 1930s.

Conversano, on the eastern edge of the Murge, overlooking the Adriatic, is dominated by a spectacular Norman castle, home of the Acquaviva Counts of Conversano for seven centuries. Built of gleaming white limestone, the castle is

surrounded by a broad square, Piazza Castello, which is the focus of the town's social life and an excellent place to while away the hours. Conversano's medieval city walls still incorporate huge blocks of stone from the town's prehistoric past. In the maze of medieval streets you will find an impressive Benedictine monastery, once the most important in Puglia, with a three-tiered tower and cupola crowned with yellow and blue majolica tiles, and a thousand-year-old Romanesque cathedral with fine carvings around the lion-flanked doorway.

From Conversano the sea is only 9km away at Polignano a Mare, where the usually flat Adriatic coast is interrupted by a pleasant cliff-lined bay popular with bathers. Sheer defensive walls cover the cliffs on the bay's south side, protecting the white-washed old town above. Today the original tiny windows are being replaced by balconies and terraces.

Once, this too was a Norman fortress, and you still enter the old town through an archway flanked by palaces. Domenico Modugno is Polignano a Mare's most famous son,

born here in 1928. His exuberant statue stands on the clifftop on the northern side of the bay. Arms spread wide he is singing his classic song *Nel blu dipinto di blu*, better known to English-speaking audiences as *Volare*. Dean Martin had worldwide success with an English version. Over lunch

cards on tiny tree-shaded squares and children play football around the drinking fountain in Piazza Palmieri. Above three-storeyed buildings strung with washing, the tower of Madonna della Madia comes into view, Monopoli's old cathedral, founded 1107 and named after a

*Locals play cards on tiny tree-shaded squares and children play football around the drinking fountain*

at Il Bastione, the waiter, who is from Monopoli, insists we make Madonna della Madia our next stop.

Monopoli is 20 minutes down the coast and much larger than Polignano. We head for Porto Vecchio, where there is a great view of the castle across the harbour and ample parking on the quayside. Walk around to the castle, passing men fishing for octopus, and you will arrive in the peaceful streets of the Città Vecchia, where locals play

Byzantine icon which is housed here. The old Romanesque building has had a stunning Baroque makeover inside. The icon is said to have been discovered in a punt floating off shore. Only the Bishop was able to retrieve it. It blew out of reach of everybody else. The finding of the Madonna della Madia is celebrated here annually between 14-16 August.

Alberobello is roughly 25km inland from Monopoli. World famous as the site of hundreds of *trulli*, ➤

*Clockwise from top left: Piazza Santa Croce in the commune of Palo del Colle; Conversano Castle, which dates back to the 14th century; the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta in Altamura*

## WHERE TO STAY

### CORTE ALTAVILLA HOTEL

Vico Goffredo Altavilla, 8 – Conversano

✉ +39 0804 959 668

[www.cortealtavilla.it](http://www.cortealtavilla.it)

Fine hotel in the heart of the old town in a former monastery, opposite cathedral.

**Double room from €65**

### MASSERIA IL FRANTOIO

Montalbano, Ostuni

✉ +39 0831 330 276

[www.masseriafrantocio.it](http://www.masseriafrantocio.it)

Enjoy a gastronomic extravaganza hosted by Armando and Rosalba Balestrazzi, a two-night gourmet stay including wine tasting, breakfast and five-course dinner.

**Two nights €199 per person**

### ALBERGO LUCY

Piazza Plebiscito, 11 – Trani

✉ +39 0883 481 022

[www.albergolucy.com](http://www.albergolucy.com)

An excellent central location in Trani with palm trees; two minutes from the marina.

**Double room from €75**



## WHERE TO EAT

### PASHÀ CAFFÈ

Piazza Castello, 5-7 – Conversano

✉ +39 0804 951 079

[www.pashaconversano.it](http://www.pashaconversano.it)

A great spot for people watching, open everyday until late. Spritz and snacks for two €8; meal for two with wine and delicious *gelato* around €25.

### COVO DEI SARACENI

Via Conversano, 1 – Polignano a Mare

✉ +39 0804 241 177

[www.covodeisaraceni.com](http://www.covodeisaraceni.com)

This hotel restaurant has an unbeatable view of the sea and old town. Treat yourself to a fabulous five-course lunch special for two with Prosecco and wine for €50.

### PASTICCERIA AL DUOMO

Via Banchina Seminario, 10 – Molfetta

✉ +39 0803 973 810

Open 6am-11.30pm from April to September. Closed Wednesdays. On the harbour next to the cathedral, Vito Farinato's bar is a local institution serving food, drinks and excellent ice cream.

► it's extraordinarily busy. *Trulli* can be seen all over the countryside here, so avoid the crowds and head instead through ancient olive groves for Masseria Il Frantoio. The *masseria*, the equivalent of a manor house, is as unique to Puglia as *trulli*, and like them they are rapidly being converted into holiday centres. Il Frantoio has remained true to its

to Altamura, amid the dry-stone walls of the high plateau. Up here, spring lines the lanes with orchids and wild fennel. Parts of Altamura's 2,500-year-old city walls are still standing but the place takes its name (*alta mura* means 'high wall') from its immense medieval walls, which have been absorbed in the city centre by bulky Palazzo del Balzo, named

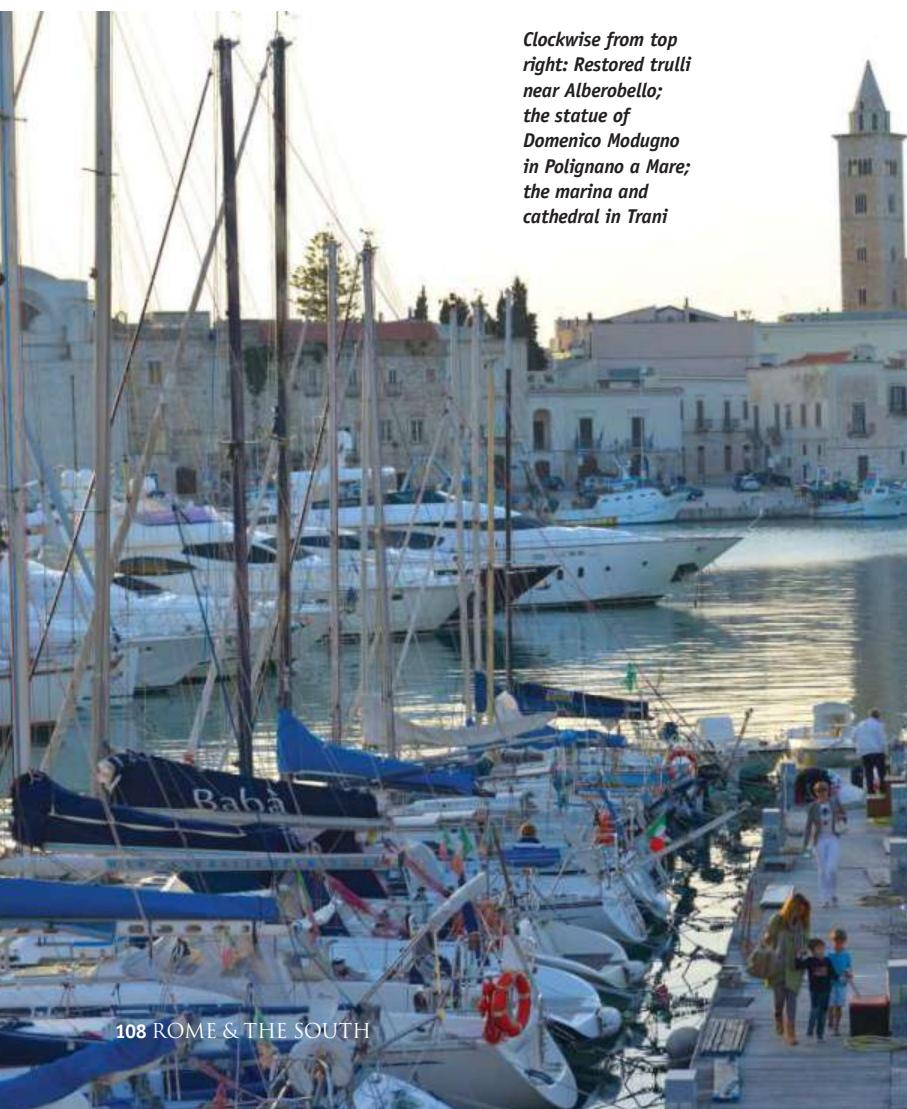
*Trulli can be seen all over the countryside here, so head instead through ancient olive groves for Masseria Il Frantoio*

origins being run as an organic farm and *azienda agrituristica*. The food, exquisitely cooked and presented, comes from the estate. Il Frantoio also supplies local restaurants like Ristò Caffè Cavour in nearby Ostuni. Famous for its medieval streets and curvaceous cathedral, Ostuni is very busy with tourists.

Back towards Bari, head deeper inland via Cassana delle Murge

after the Roman Prince Raimondello Orsini del Balzo, who lived here until 1620. Arriving in blistering mid-afternoon heat, we are saved by the cool of Bar Corona on Piazza Zanardelli. It's a short walk to shady Corso Frederico II where the old limestone paving has been polished to a high shine by so many feet. Altamura's twin-towered cathedral gradually comes into view at the

*Clockwise from top right: Restored trulli near Alberobello; the statue of Domenico Modugno in Polignano a Mare; the marina and cathedral in Trani*





end of the street. Begun 1232 by the Swabian Emperor Frederick, it has a fabulously decorated main entrance.

Nearby, Gravina in Puglia straddles a boulder-lined ravine, the *gravina*, cut deep into the plateau by a river still flowing above ground, a rarity here. When Gravina was sacked by Saracens, Normans and finally Romans, the town's inhabitants fled to caves in the ravine and stayed there. San Michele delle Grotte is a church cut into a cave said to date back to this time. The Roman Orsinis managed to hang on here for nearly 400 years exploiting the locals until 1807. Palazzo Orsini remains and the family insignia, the bear, supports the columns of 14th-century Santa Maria dei Morti, in place of the usual lions.

The coast above Bari is a gentle hour's drive from Gravina. Open rolling hills blend into olive groves as we near the shore at Molfetta, home to one of the largest fishing fleets on the Adriatic. We zigzag through streets of brightly painted houses with wrought iron balconies to the harbour and park right in front of the 12th-century cathedral on the

waterfront. After an excellent Spritz cocktail and ice cream, we enjoy a craft market organised by local art students. Madonna dei Martiri, the patron saint of sailors, is celebrated here at the *Fest d'la Médron* with fireworks and a grand procession over land and sea which lasts for three days from 8 September.

Last stop is Trani, an important centre of the wine trade, 17km further up the coast. In contrast to Molfetta, which is laid back and unpretentious, Trani is chic and prosperous. It's a beautiful evening and there is a party atmosphere. The coast is looking its best along the waterfront on Lungomare Columbo. We follow the sound of a DJ from Piazza Plebiscito, with palm trees at its centre, to the marina and find the decks set up outside the first of many bars and restaurants along Via Statuti Maritimi. We enjoy the music, seated on the harbour wall, drink in hand, watching the sun set behind the thousand-year-old cathedral of San Nichola Pelegrino across the water. All of Trani's festivals are held here on the harbour. It's a lovely backdrop for a celebration. **R**



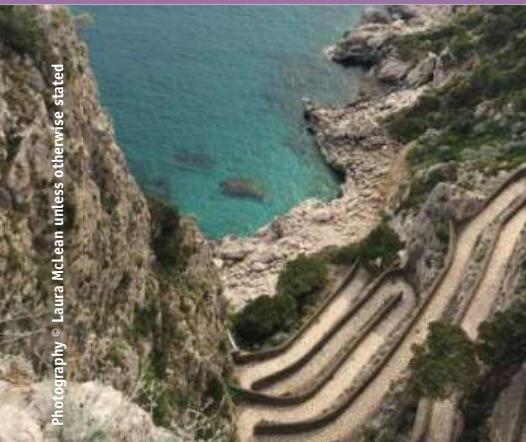


Image © Palazzo Murat, Positano

# *Gourmet guide to Amalfi*

The Amalfi Coast is known for its high cliffs, perilous roads, stunning views – and fantastic seafood.

**Laura McLean** takes a five-day gourmet trip to discover the finest food in the best locations...





Trio of desserts at the Grand Royal Hotel

## DAY 1: ARRIVING AT SORRENTO

We spend our journey from Naples Airport to Sorrento white-knuckled as our driver whizzes us through a tangle of villages and coastal roads while stunning scenery flashes by.

We arrive at **The Grand Royal Hotel**, a charming lodge resting right on the cliff overlooking Sorrento's port, offering fantastic views of the stunning Mount Vesuvius looming majestically over the Bay of Naples.

We start the afternoon with lunch at Sorrento's famous **Fauno Bar**. Situated right in the centre of Piazza Tasso, Sorrento's main square, Fauno Bar offers a fantastic location to sit and watch the world go by.

Alfonzo, Fauno Bar's owner, greets us as he instructs his doting staff and welcomes us to Sorrento. We start with the house white, a Sannio Falanghina, fresh and sweet – perfect for a warm afternoon.

I order the *spaghetti frutti di mare* as I'm on a mission to try as much of the local seafood as humanly possible, and this dish does not disappoint! Clams, mussels, prawns and scallops combine with fresh cherry tomatoes and a splash of wine to create a rich, flavoursome sauce – I am in food heaven. We finish with an *affogato* and set off to explore Sorrento.

Becky, Citalia's Neapolitan Riviera Manager, walks us through the main square and into the labyrinth of back streets of the old town, known as "the drains". Here you will find handcrafted leather sandals and bags, gallons of limoncello, fresh fruit and vegetables, linens and cottons, scarves and ceramics.

Smells of incense waft from the churches and beautiful flowers line every street – the people of Sorrento

take pride in their gardens, even if said garden is composed of just a few pots on a balcony.

We retire to our hotel, which hosts our first evening meal – we are still full from our lunch but delicious smells come through to Reception, tempting us towards the restaurant to feast. We order the tasting menu, which really gives you insight into Amalfi Coast food. Course one consists of garlic baked until it's buttery, soft and spreadable, fresh bread, tomato salsa and creamed potato with lemon and prawns.

We then move on to a salad, with a soft and tender raw scallop delicately presented with filo shavings and pansy petals, then drizzled with a strawberry vinaigrette. The delightful langoustine is topped with a pesto herb crust and a roasted tomato balancing the flavours perfectly.

My favourite dish is the ravioli served in a little wonton steamer, filled with creamed, zesty potato – it's like gnocchi elegantly wrapped in wafer-thin pasta. We then have a little taster of shrimp spaghetti twirled around a fork. The sweetness of the shrimp perfectly cuts through the salty sauce and is complemented by acidic tomato. We then taste fillet of salmon and a warm salad of finely chopped lettuce and red cabbage, dressed with soy sauce.

We finish with a trio of desserts: rum baba dripping with boozy goodness, a light and creamy lemon delice and a cheesecake composed of panna cotta, large fresh strawberries and a sweet and fruity compote.

Spanning three hours, the meal is leisurely and enjoyable. The waiting staff cannot do enough for us and ensure our glasses are always topped up with wines that accompany our courses beautifully. ➤

### GETTING THERE

#### ► BY PLANE

The nearest airport is Naples, which is about 60–90 minutes' drive away from Sorrento and Amalfi. Between them, BA, easyJet, Thomson, Monarch and Meridiana offer flights from most major UK airports.

### WHAT TO SEE AND DO

#### GROUP TOUR OF CAPRI AND ANACAPRI

[www.acamporatravel.it](http://www.acamporatravel.it)

A group tour of Capri and Anacapri from Sorrento: full day, £62 per person.

#### GROUP TOUR OF POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM

[www.acamporatravel.it](http://www.acamporatravel.it)

A group tour of Pompeii and Herculaneum from Sorrento: full day, £46 per person – or £90 per person to go with a smaller group and have lunch included. The wine tasting at the vineyard where they make the Lacryma Christi Del Vesuvio wines, and olive oil can be booked locally through Acampora Travel.

#### IL GUSTO DELLA COSTA LIMONCELLO FACTORY

[www.sunland.it](http://www.sunland.it)

[www.ilgustodellacosta.it](http://www.ilgustodellacosta.it)

A visit to the Gusto Della Costa limoncello factory can be arranged locally through Sunland, or via the factory directly.

#### VISIT THE TOWNS ON THE ROUTE

The following tour option to visit the towns on the route is also available for Citalia customers to book as perhaps a more realistic alternative to having a private driver the whole time. Amalfi Drive from Sorrento: full day, £30 per person. Amalfi Drive Select from Sorrento with a smaller group, including lunch: full day, £92 per person.





## DAY 2: A DAY ON CAPRI

We take the 9.50am jetfoil over to Capri for a guided tour of this beautiful idyll island. Capri is famed for its luxurious boutiques, celebrity callers, rugged coastlines, cool cafés and its breathtaking Blue Grotto. Capri is a tourist haven and we want to discover some of its charm.

We pass the Welcome Statue waving as we start our boat tour of Capri. First we come across the Coral Grotto where, just below sea level, we admire bright orange coral flourishing on the rocks. We then visit the Grotta Bianca, where a stalagmite has grown into a statue of Madonna, watching over us from overhead. The captain of our boat makes sure we get a fantastic view by reversing right into every grotto we come across so that we can see high up into the caves. We then whizz round to the *I Faraglioni* – three spurs of rock rising up out of the sea. Faraglione di Mezzo is big enough to pass through in a small boat, and that's exactly what we do. A buzz of excitement fills the boat as we approach this marvelous rock, our guide tells us to kiss a loved one as we pass through for good luck!

The Green Grotto produces stunning green hues in the water, due to the way the light from a submarine cave reflects against the rocks above. Grotta Verde is one of the longest caves on the island and is ten metres deep.

We pass the Punta Carena lighthouse hovering over the south of Capri before approaching the Grotta Azzurra (Blue Grotto). Here you can hop aboard a wooden rowing boat and be taken through one of the most enchanting caves in the world. Mind your head as you enter a very small passage into the grotto, where you will be welcomed by the sound of traditional Italian song and crystal blue water. It is said that Emperor Tiberius used the grotto as his swimming pool when he retired to the island in 27AD.

We disembark at Capri Harbour and head for Anacapri, slowly sprialling around the island's mountainous roads and tiny villages. We reach Anacapri and, after a quick espresso and sample of Capri cake, we head for the chairlift to take us up to the summit of Monte Solaro, 589 metres above sea level. As we take a tranquil ride up to the summit, we look below to see locals tending their gardens.

We hastily hop off the chairlift, climb the ancient stairs and discover the peaceful lookout where you can sit and admire one of Italy's most stunning coastlines. Anacapri offers sensational views out to sea.

We head back down for lunch in Capri Town. It's not a trip to Capri without a Caprese salad, each is presented in its own individual way and is utterly delicious.

We head to the main square of Capri Town, packed with designer shops, bakeries and perfume boutiques. We work our way through the streets to reach the stunning Augustus Gardens, offering yet more beauty spots and photo opportunities.

Back in Sorrento we freshen up and enjoy an Aperol spritz at sunset before heading out for our evening meal. Tonight we dine at *Da Gigino*, located in the historical centre of Sorrento. *Da Gigino* is a traditional pizzeria with a woodburning oven offering some of the best pizzas you'll find in town. We order a selection, though the Pizza Gigino is a unanimous favourite, topped with tomato, fresh buffalo mozzarella, salami, olives and ham.

*It's not a trip to Capri without a Caprese salad, each presented in its own individual way...*



## DAY 3: TO HERCULANEUM

Our third day takes us to Herculaneum. Hidden by ash and rock during 79AD's eruption of Vesuvius, Herculaneum remained undiscovered until 1739 and it wasn't until 1927 when full archaeological excavation began and Herculaneum truly came to light. Unlike Pompeii, Herculaneum is only about one third excavated at present.

We take a walk through time and explore the many shops, villas, homes, stables and offices of those who walked these streets centuries ago. The amazing thing about Herculaneum is the realization of how advanced civilisation was and the complex systems these people used for building, preserving water and day-to-day living.

Incorporated into this trip was a visit to a vineyard where we had a light lunch and tasted several local wines, including Lacryma Christi Del Vesuvio, the "Tears of Christ".

This evening we head to the **Antica Trattoria** in the heart of Sorrento, for what has to be the greatest meal I've ever had. We want to try everything and owner Aldo and his team of charming waiters are more than happy to entertain. Aldo has owned the restaurant for 30 years and it has been in his family since 1930.

We are guided to the beautiful terrace and offered a cool and crisp glass of prosecco served with local breads and olives to whet the appetite before we embark on a mammoth meal of culinary delights. Our *primo* is a savoury profiterole bursting with leeks and ricotta and topped with a creamy white sauce, followed by one of the Antica Trattoria's speciality dishes: courgette flower stuffed with ricotta and ham, fried in tempura and perched on top of a caramelized onion ring in red wine vinegar.

We then begin the fish courses, starting with *palamita* marinated in Sorrento oranges and lemons, fennel, yoghurt mousse and passion fruit, served with celery sorbet.

Next is tuna, wrapped in sesame seeds, on an onion sauce, with cuttlefish ink. At this point, head waiter Tony sings to us as Aldo and his son Luca pour us more wine. This is a dining experience second to none.

We then try the *calamari*, which is soft and smooth, flavoured with zesty orange and lemon and texturized with pistachio. We then have a breaded prawn dish with a sardine sauce before moving on to creamed peas with a quenelle of ricotta flavoured with Sorrento lemons.

The following dish instantly becomes my favourite, and is the restaurant's speciality. *Tagliolini Pasta Antica Trattoria* is pasta with prawns and lumpfish in a cream and lemon sauce with spinach, presented in a hollowed out lemon. For a region blessed with such beautiful fruit it's wonderful to see that they have not only perfected their recipes, but also that nothing goes to waste.

After the langoustine and asparagus risotto, we take a break with some lemon sorbet and begin to feel the bloat of this fabulous meal. There's one more savoury course to come before dessert, and it does not disappoint. Fillet of sea bass served with mille-feuille of aubergine and a tomato, potato and courgette croquette shaped like a pear. This course is presented beautifully and tastes delightful.

Out comes the *semifreddo*: chocolate, coffee and hazelnuts – and it's light and sweet and exquisite – followed by a white panna cotta with lime, almonds and passionfruit jelly, topped with a caramel brittle. A grand finale to a wonderful meal. ➤

## WHERE TO STAY

MULTI-CENTRE BREAK WITH CITALIA  
01293 731753  
[www.citalia.com](http://www.citalia.com)

**citalia**  
the leading Italian specialist

Citalia, the leading Italian specialist, has a five-night multi-centre break to Sorrento and Amalfi from £879 per person, based on two sharing. This price includes three nights at the Grand Hotel Royal in Sorrento, followed by two nights at the Hotel Santa Caterina in Amalfi, both on a B&B basis. Also included is a 10 per cent discount at Parrucchiano Restaurant in Sorrento, a guaranteed room upgrade at Santa Caterina, a €30 shopping credit in the hotel's boutique, private transfers throughout the trip, and return flights from London Gatwick with British Airways. Based on departures on 21 October 2015.

**GRAND HOTEL ROYAL**  
Via Correale, 42 – Sorrento  
+39 081 807 3434  
[www.citalia.com/hotel/S16](http://www.citalia.com/hotel/S16)

Just around the corner from Museo Correale di Terranove, a few minutes' walk from the centre of Sorrento, the 4-star Grand Hotel Royal has a commanding position on the cliff with wonderful views of the Bay of Naples and Mount Vesuvius.

**PALAZZO MURAT HOTEL**  
Via dei Mulini, 23 – Positano  
+39 089 875177  
[www.citalia.com/hotel/119133](http://www.citalia.com/hotel/119133)  
The charming 4-star Palazzo Murat is situated in a pedestrianised area in the heart of Positano.

**HOTEL SANTA CATERINA**  
Via Mauro Comite, 9 – Amalfi  
+39 089 871012  
[www.citalia.com/hotel/A15](http://www.citalia.com/hotel/A15)  
Perched high on a clifftop amidst scented lemon and orange groves, the prestigious 5-star Hotel Santa Caterina enjoys an exceptional position with breathtaking, uninterrupted views out to sea.





*The chefs at La Antica Trattoria*



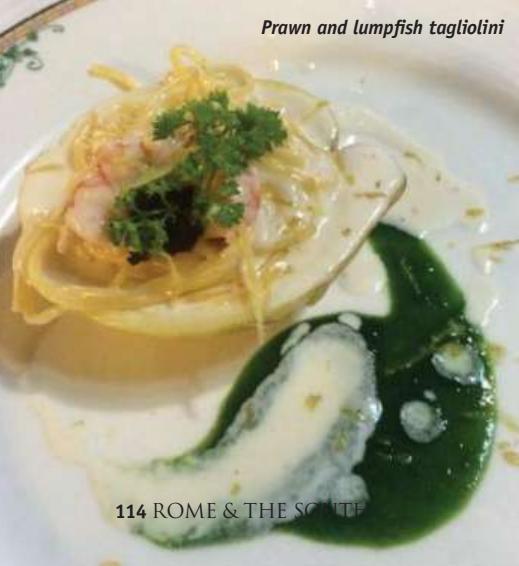
*Courgette flower tempura*



*La Antica Trattoria*



*Palamita*



*Prawn and lumpfish tagliolini*



*Langoustine and asparagus risotto*



*Panna cotta*



Laura with Valentino at *il Gusto della Costa*



The Santa Caterina kitchens



Limoncello from *il Gusto della Costa*



The Hotel Santa Caterina



Santa Caterina appetizers



Santa Caterina cheesecake

## DAY 4: POSITANO, PRAIANO AND AMALFI

**S**till full from last night's meal we begin our journey along the Amalfi coastal road to our next hotel. The winding road is not for the fainthearted, with steep cliffs on one side and a drop all the way to the sea on the other. Along the way are many lay-bys to stop and admire the spectacular views. The roads get narrower and narrower as we approach Positano and so we all breath in, hoping it will help us fit through the slender streets.

Houses are precariously stacked upon the cliffside and the cobbled streets are tucked away in this endearing town. Above, pergolas dripping with wisteria shade us from the hot sun. We visit the small beach to admire the still, serene water and the towering cliffs overhead.

We head to the charming **Palazzo Murat Hotel** for lunch, where we enjoy an aperitif on the terrace. We start with a selection of salads – warm Caprese style salad with smoked provola cheese, a seafood salad made up of crayfish, prawns and squid, and a

beautiful orange and lemon salad with thinly sliced octopus.

We share a few of the favourites for our main, to get a taste of what the hotel's restaurant has to offer. *Scialatielli* with shrimps and rocket, ravioli with ricotta and mozzarella, topped with tomato and basil sauce, and veal meatballs with gently sautéed broccoli – all the fruit and vegetables used in our meal are grown here in the restaurant garden.

We leave Positano behind us and head for Praiano, to visit a limoncello factory recommended by celebrity chef, Citalia brand ambassador (and my personal hero!), Gennaro Contaldo.

### Il Gusto della Costa owner

Valentino Esposito explains how he makes his organic limoncello and why it can only be made on the Amalfi Coast. Amalfi lemons are like no other, Valentino explains. "Without quality ingredients, we cannot make quality limoncello," and adds with a cheeky smile, "That's why ours is so good!"

Not only does *Il Gusto della Costa* supply local restaurants with

limoncello, but also Jamie's Italian restaurants across the UK. Valentino also produces a fine selection of marmalades and jams, from chilli onion to prickly pear.

Full of limoncello, and various other liqueurs offered to us by Valentino, we head to our hotel, the **Hotel Santa Caterina** in Amalfi. This wonderful 5-star hotel has a fresh, modern feel to it, despite being open since 1880. Our evening meal in Hotel Santa Caterina's restaurant is headed by maître'd Pino. We begin with a courgette flower stuffed with ricotta, then ravioli stuffed with aubergine, ricotta and smoked provola cheese, topped with cherry tomato sauce.

Our main is scabbardfish with potato and tomato and garlic croutons, but the climax is dessert. The restaurant's pastry chef, Roberto Ricco, has created a cheesecake with a dark chocolate base to cut through the creamy topping, topped with paper-thin, moulded white chocolate and a brittle tuile. Even if you don't come for dinner, do come for dessert. ➤

As we approach Positano we all breath in, hoping it will help us fit through the slender streets...

## WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

## FAUNO BAR

*Piazza Tasso, 13/15 – Sorrento*[www.faunobar.it](http://www.faunobar.it)

Relax with a drink or a meal with friends at the famous Fauno Bar in the main square of Sorrento.

€ €

## GRAND HOTEL ROYAL – RESTAURANT LE RELAIS &amp; GLICINI ROOM

*Via Correale, 42 – Sorrento*

+39 081 807 3434

[www.royalsorrento.com/en/restaurant-le-relais-glicini-room.php](http://www.royalsorrento.com/en/restaurant-le-relais-glicini-room.php)

A charming boutique style restaurant offering both modern and traditional Sorrento cuisine.

€ € €

## RISTORANTE AL CAPRI

*Via Roma, 38 – Capri*

+39 081 837 7108

[info@ristorantealcapri.it](mailto:info@ristorantealcapri.it)

Classic yet contemporary, offering a wide selection of fish dishes and fantastic views over Capri Harbour.

€ € €

## L'ANTICA TRATTORIA

*Via Padre Reginaldo Giuliani, 33*

Sorrento

[www.lanticatrattoria.com](http://www.lanticatrattoria.com)

Nestled in the back streets of Sorrento, enjoy the garden terrace and fantastic Sorrento food.

€ € €

## DA GIGINO

*Via Degli Archi, 15 – Sorrento*

+39 081 878 1927

[info@dagigino.com](mailto:info@dagigino.com)[www.dagigino.com](http://www.dagigino.com)

A classic pizzeria in the heart of Sorrento offering traditional pizza baked in a wood burning oven.

€ €

## RESTAURANT SANTA CATERINA

*Via Mauro Comite, 9 – Amalfi*

+39 089 871012

[www.hotelsantacaterina.it](http://www.hotelsantacaterina.it)

Stunning desserts as well as traditional Amalfi cuisine.

€ € €

## TRATTORIA DA GEMMA

*Via Fra Gerardo Sasso, 11 – Amalfi*

+39 089 871345

[info@trattoriadagemma.com](mailto:info@trattoriadagemma.com)[www.trattoriadagemma.com](http://www.trattoriadagemma.com)

A hidden 'Gem' tucked into Amalfi's busy main square.

€ €



Octopus at the Palazzo



The Palazzo's seafood salad



The terrace at the Palazzo



Main courses at the Palazzo



Il Garden



## DAY 5: RAVELLO TO AMALFI

**R**ainy Ravello. The weather takes a turn for the worst as we head up the turbulent mountains of Ravello in hope of the best views of Amalfi from above. Goosebumps aplenty, we all gasp at every turn in hope a bus won't come around the hairpin bend.

Ravello certainly offers the most stunning views of the Amalfi Coast, as well as enchanting gardens and a buzzing piazza. The town is full of quirky boutiques, handcrafted trinkets and stunning ceramics.

Unfortunately for us, the weather is not on our side for this hilltop paradise and we resort to looking at our guidebooks, imagining the views we are missing. As the heavens open we dive in to **Il Garden** for a light lunch. Luckily, as we tuck in to our cured meats and local cheeses, the sun makes an appearance and we take advantage of the dazzling views.

On the way back down to Amalfi we experience a terrifying ordeal when two coaches try and pass on a corner I'd struggle to get a Fiat Panda through. Our driver guides us through without so much as a nudge to the wing mirror and with a sigh of relief we're back in Amalfi to enjoy the spa offerings and sea-water pool of our hotel.

Our final meal of this wonderful trip is held in the **Trattoria Da Gemma**, where we taste the smoked mozzarella grilled in lemon leaves, fried *pizzetta* and Parma ham, followed by Nonna Gemma's most famous dish: large tube-shaped pasta *alla genovese*. The chunky beef sauce is slowly cooked for several hours and topped with crispy onions. Our final dish in Amalfi is a huge piece of slate with every single dessert from the menu on it. Nonna Gemma knows how to keep food travellers happy. 

## WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

### RESTAURANT "AL PALAZZO"

Palazzo Murat, Via dei Mulini, 23  
Positano

✉ +39 089 875177

[www.palazzomurat.it/restaurant-positano](http://www.palazzomurat.it/restaurant-positano)

In the centre of Positano, enjoy fine cuisine in a hidden garden surrounded by lemon trees.

€ € €

### IL GARDEN

Via Boccaccio, 4 – Ravello

✉ +39 089 857226

[info@gardenravello.com](mailto:info@gardenravello.com)

Panoramic views over the Amalfi Coast, high up in Ravello, offering fantastic seafood and pasta dishes as well as local cheeses and cured meats from the mountains.

€ €

## INFORMATION

### ► MULTI-CENTRES WITH CITALIA

Citalia's multi-centre holidays allow holiday makers to easily experience a whole region in one holiday. Some multi-centre trips are bookable via the Citalia website, others are call-to-book, where Citalia's team of travel experts can put together a trip tailor-made to customers' needs and create almost any multi-centre combo that they would like.

### ► CITALIA SECRETS

Citalia prides itself on providing the highest levels of service to customers, both before their holiday and once they arrive. Once they have booked, Citalia provides all its customers with access to its online service, Citalia Secrets, designed to enhance their holiday with great recommendations, from local restaurants and attractions to providing tips on local beauty spots and cultural events. It also provides contact details for our concierge team, who are contactable by telephone or email to help book tours and for any advice or assistance whilst on holiday, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### ► NEAPOLITAN RIVIERA MANAGER

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*Clockwise  
from top left:  
Polignano a  
Mare, old town;  
the Piazza  
dell'Orologio at  
Polignano a Mare;  
Conversano's  
famous marching  
band; Hotel Corte  
Altavilla; San  
Mauro Monastery;  
a gate through  
the ancient city  
wall; Ferrovia  
cherry orchards;  
spritz and taralli  
at Pashà*



48 HOURS IN...

# Conversano

Off the beaten track, and yet still within striking distance of Bari airport, Conversano's relaxed atmosphere offers a peaceful and easy break. **Jane Gifford** flies down to Puglia...

**I**t's early evening in the *centro storico*, the historical centre of the ancient little walled town of Conversano in the Bari district of Puglia. The town is built on a gentle hill. At its summit, in the centre of a broad square, a gleaming white limestone fortress catches the last light of the sinking sun. Shadows slide over the surrounding buildings. The square is paved with limestone slabs that have been polished to a high shine by countless feet. There is a slightly disorientating slope upwards towards the old cathedral. Lights are coming on in cafés and bars. People stand chatting in groups. Floodlights turn on and the castle glows golden beneath a pink-flushed sky. It's a lovely scene and a perfect start to any short break in this part of Italy.

Taking a seat on the square outside Pashà restaurant and café, I watch the crowds gather to enjoy this beautiful evening and relish the moment over a spritz, Italy's favourite cocktail – a healthy shot of Aperol over ice in a large glass of Prosecco, served here in Conversano with carrot crudités and a large bowl of *taralli*, a local speciality: crunchy and delicious biscuit rings made with flour, oil and wine. I am a new face in town so friendly locals immediately engage me in conversation. "The weather's fine all weekend, you must see Polignano a Mare." "Don't miss our beautiful churches here in Conversano." "You have to try Pashà's ice cream." I order two scoops, one almond, one pistachio. Delicious. Most cafés and restaurants here pride themselves on making their own ice-cream. You will seldom be disappointed. "Try the *granita di limone* at Bar Torrione. It's the best in town," somebody adds. ➤



## WHAT TO SEE AND DO

### HANG OUT ON PIAZZA CASTELLO 1

The is the real centre of the action, and if you do nothing else on a weekend in Conversano, you will not have wasted your time. There is plenty to do in the area, but if you decide that what you want to do is very little at all, you are well within your rights! Just spend the weekend sampling all the bars and cafés on the square and watch the world go by.

### TAKE AN EARLY MORNING WALK AROUND THE CENTRO STORICO 2

The early morning light shows the town off at its best, and if the town is busy with tourists at the time of your visit, this is the time to do your sightseeing. Visit Conversano's many churches, the Castle Museum, and don't miss the Civic Museum in the Benedictine Monastery.

### TAKE A BIKE RIDE 3

Cycle out to the Chiesa di Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, an 8th century Byzantine rural church shaped like a four-leafed clove. The ancient watch tower and ruins of Castiglione date right back to the 14th century BC.

### VISIT CASTLE MARCHIONE 4

This was once the lodge of a hunting estate belonging to the counts of Conversano Acquaviva of Aragon. In its day it was surrounded by oak grove and shrubland that covered more than 1,000 hectares. According to legend, the castle is linked to the castle of Conversano by a secret passage.

### HAVE AN ICE CREAM AT MARIO CAMPANELLA'S SUPER MAGO DEL GELO 5

Piazza Garibaldi, 22 – Polignano a Mare  
+39 080 424 0025

[www.mariocampellanailsupermagodelgelo.it](http://www.mariocampellanailsupermagodelgelo.it)

Take a ride down to Polignano a Mare, have a swim at Cala Paura Beach (unless it's the middle of winter!) then visit the old town, and finish off the excursion by having an ice cream at Mario Campanella's Super Mago del Gelo, established in 1935 and still serving the best in town.

### TAKE THE TRAIN TO CASTELLANA GROTTE 6

[www.grottedicstellana.it](http://www.grottedicstellana.it)

In Conversano you are within range of the Caves of Castellana, one of the most important visitor attractions in all Puglia. Since they opened, the caves have attracted more than 15 million visitors, but that's just in recent times. Given that they started forming about 90 million years ago, one can imagine that a few others have been here before us. Book the two-hour English tour.



Cala Paura Beach at Polignano a Mare

## DON'T MISS

### HANDBALL

Go and see the local handball team. The population of Conversano is only 25,000 or so, but their handball team plays in the top national league. They have been national champions four times in the past decade, making them the country's most successful team after Trieste.

► Overwhelmed with suggestions of what to see and do, I walk around the cathedral to Hotel Corte Altavilla, just moments away in the medieval backstreets in the heart of the old town. The hotel is itself a converted medieval court. The entrance is directly opposite the intricately carved main entrance to Conversano's Romanesque cathedral, which dates back to the 11th century. Damaged by fire in 1911, the cathedral has been restored inside and recently underwent a major cleaning outside. Now it is once more gleaming white. Almost everything in the old centre is built of white limestone, a distinguishing characteristic of

the road." I check with the garage attendant. "Ma certo, signora. It's what everybody does." He even moves a display stand right outside the kiosk so that I can fit in easily. And with that simple gesture all my parking problems are solved.

The railway station is only a short walk away from the old town so, even without a car, surrounding attractions, as well as Bari airport, are easily accessible. There is a decent bus service and most hotels have bicycles for guests to use. Since the immediate countryside is generally flat, this is a pleasant way to get about. Take a tour of the cherry orchards surrounding Conversano. Meander through olive

*Conversano is an ideal place to experience an authentic sample of Puglian life*

Puglian architecture. Generally the old town is closed to traffic. I have left my car in the pay-and-display car park nearby. "No," says the hotel receptionist. "No need to pay. Just park on the forecourt of any petrol station. There are two across

groves down to the sea or head off towards the Istrian Valley and amuse yourself by playing 'Spot the Trulli'.

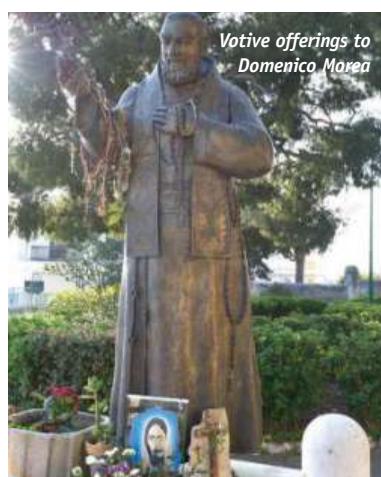
Conversano is a little gem unspoilt by mass tourism and an ideal place to experience an authentic sample of Puglian life. The medieval



The Della Corte is always lively



The Norman Castle



Votive offerings to Domenico Morea

centre is remarkably unspoilt by modern development and one of Puglia's most beautiful beaches is only a few kilometres away. Up early, I join the dog-walkers and older residents for a turn around the old town before breakfast. You can see the

yellow and blue majolica tiles on the tower's domed roof, and on a much larger dome behind it, gleam in the morning sun. This was once the most important monastery in Puglia. In the 13th century it was given by the Pope to Cistercian nuns, who were

*Bright yellow and blue majolica tiles on the tower's domed roof gleam in the morning sun*

Adriatic from Piazza Castello. The air is bright and clear and there is a light breeze off the sea. By 7am the cafés are already filling with regulars. Students from the college across the road favour Della Corte on Piazza Conciliazione, which is a continuation of the main square around the back of the castle. It's the most inexpensive of the bars and always lively. Those who want the best view or to read a newspaper in peace choose Pashà.

After breakfast I head down via San Mauro towards the three-tiered tower of Conversano's Benedictine Monastery, which was founded on an ancient crypt dedicated to San Mauro in the 6th century. Bright

remarkable in being the only female order in western Europe allowed to wear male religious symbols. The Civic Museum is housed in the impressively restored rooms of the monastery. Nearby, below the castle walls, within a little courtyard sheltered by awnings, is Caffè 7000. It's a great spot for coffee, juices and a variety of excellent quality snacks. Being off the main drag it's even more reasonably priced than the other bars, none of which are expensive. Back on Piazza Castello the sound of music announces the approach of Conversano's famous band, who march across the square carrying Trade Union banners. (Well, it's

## DON'T MISS

**THE CHERRY FESTIVAL**  
The cherry season comes early to Puglia and the first week of June is set aside to celebrate the harvest of the 'ferrovia' (railway) cherry, a fat, juicy local variety said to have originated from a single pit which took root on a railway siding near Sammichele di Bari in the 1930s.

## WHERE TO STAY

### HOTEL CORTE 7

Vico Goffredo Altavilla, 8 – Conversano

✉ +39 080 495 9668

[www.cortealtavilla.it](http://www.cortealtavilla.it)

A 4-star 'Hotel de Charme' in a former medieval palace opposite the cathedral, right in the heart of the *centro storico* of Conversano. Secret yet sought after, tucked away as it is among the medieval *vicoli* of the old town. Friendly staff, and a little wellness centre. Great rooftop dining too, as well as complementary use of the beach club at Cozze. Rooms cost from €69 with breakfast included.

### PALAZZO D'ERCHIA 8

Via Acquaviva d'Aragona, 116 – Conversano

✉ +39 080 495 0350

[www.palazzoderchia.it](http://www.palazzoderchia.it)

A charming and popular little 3-star hotel located in a palace on the outskirts of the old town. Built in the 17th century, when the town was expanded and the district of Casalnuovo was built. Restoration work in 2002 gave the building back its original beauty by enriching its ancient surroundings with modern facilities, transforming it into a 3-star hotel with every comfort. Rooms cost from €52 with breakfast included.

### CASALE DELLE VOLPI 9

Via Cellini, 14 – Conversano

**Book through [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com)**

If you need your independence, Casale delle Volpi offers self-catering accommodation with exposed stonework and ethnic-style furnishings. A one-bedroom apartment for two adults in a 14th century building in the heart of the old town will cost you from €41 per night.

### HOTEL SAN TOMMASO 10

Casa da Bagiolaro, Polignano a Mare

✉ +39 080 426 5573

[www.santomaso.net](http://www.santomaso.net)

An historic building full of old world charm and elegance on the road between Conversano and Polignano a Mare. All the elegance of 19th century hospitality combined with 21st century presentation. Prices range from £62 per night for a junior suite, with breakfast included.

### HOTEL COVO DEI SARACENI 11

Via Conversano, 1a – Polignano a Mare

✉ +39 080 424 1177

[www.covodeisaraceni.com](http://www.covodeisaraceni.com)

4-star elegance in a stunning location sheltered by the cliffs above Cala Paura Beach. Excellent food at il Bastione restaurant, and a wellness centre. The comfort and service of an international-level 4-star hotel but with an atmosphere typical of the Puglia region. Double rooms £91 with breakfast included.

## WHERE TO EAT

There are a great many excellent and reasonably priced places to eat in Conversano. Just to keep it simple, I have selected those on Piazza Castello in the Centro Storico.

### PASHÀ ⑫

Piazza Castello, 6

✉ +39 080 495 1079

A personal favourite. Chic and fancy food are offered in the restaurant, while drinks and simpler food are available in the bar, all with the best view of the castle on the square. A welcoming and unpretentious atmosphere, but the food is very good. And they do great *orecchiette*, the local ear-shaped pasta, which you simply have to try at least once while you are in Puglia. Here is the place to do that.

Price range € €

### GOFFREDO RISTORANTE ⑬

Vico Altavilla, 8

✉ +39 080 495 9668

Dine on the roof of Hotel Corte Altavilla in the heart of the old town. Being on top of this former medieval court, you look out over the roof-tops of Conversano, with glimpses of the bell tower of the old cathedral in one direction and the shimmer of the Adriatic in the other. Try the local speciality menu. Reservations required.

Price range € €

### CLICHÉ ⑭

Piazza Castello, 15/16

✉ +39 080 246 2749

Contemporary design and excellent food within the medieval walls of Conversano Castle. The name may be Cliché, but nothing else about the place is. Full of character and contrast, and serving the most fantastic Pugliese cuisine.

Price range € €

### MEDIEVAL PIZZERIA ⑮

Via Cardinale Casimiro Gennari, 10

✉ +39 080 495 9093

Very small and not always open when you would expect it to be, but a really good place to stop and eat when it is. It's just off the Piazza Castello – simply head for the main entrance of the cathedral and you will find it. Dinner for two with wine can be from just €20.

Price range € €

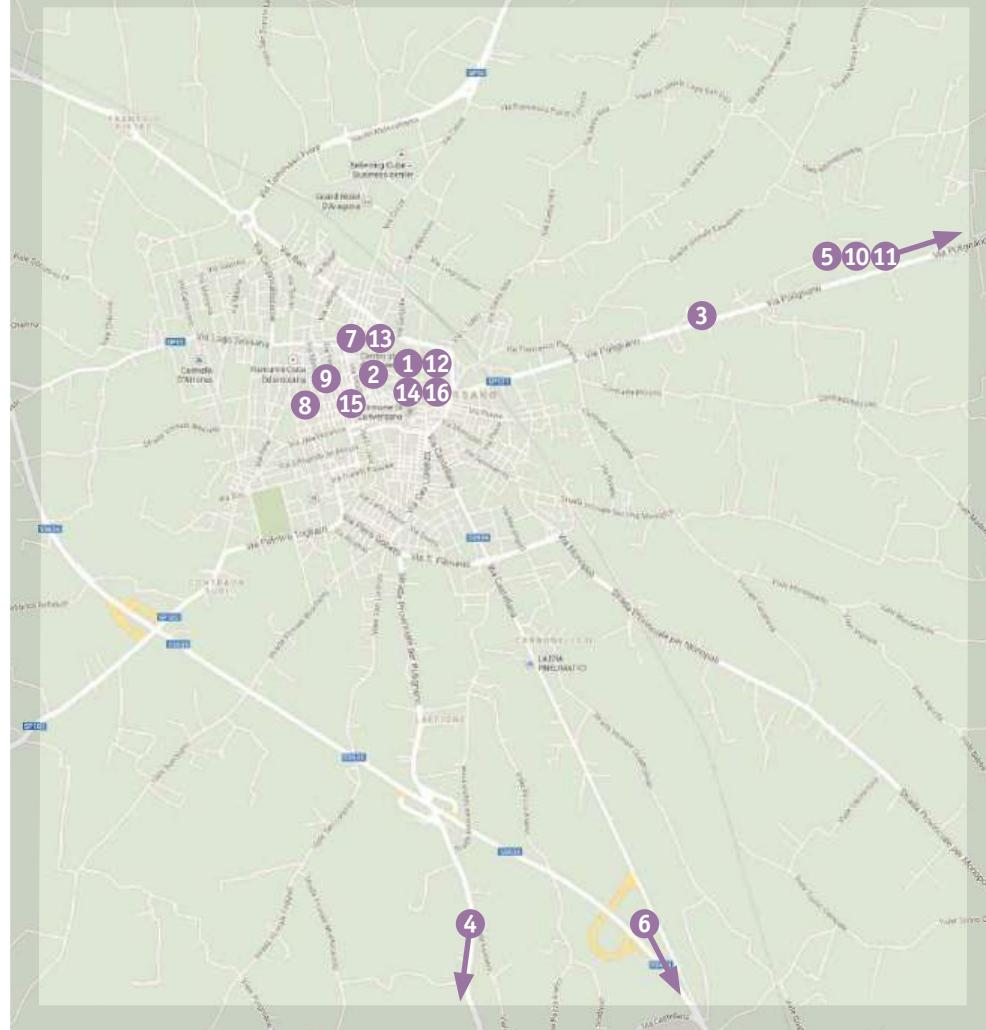
### PIZZERIA TERRAROSSA ⑯

Corso Domenico Morea, 14

✉ +39 080 495 7208

A really good value pizzeria with a nice lively atmosphere, inside the castle, with more than 70 pizzas to choose from. It is located at the front of the castle, on the seaward side.

Price range €



## DON'T MISS

**HOLY WEEK**  
The celebration of Easter remains an important event on the calendar in this deeply religious region. Good Friday sees the rite of the Kiss of the Black Christ. On Thursday night the faithful go to the church of Santa Maria dell'Isola, where the cross is kept, and at 3am the procession begins its march towards Conversano.

► more of a casual swagger than a march. This is southern Italy!) The tradition dates back to 1832.

Conversano Castle was built by the Normans. The town, then known as Norba, was the capital of a large county under the rule of Altavilla. The castle was inherited 1456 by Caterina Orsini Del Balzo. She and her husband, Giulio Antonio, started the long line of the Counts

the finest examples of Neapolitan baroque in Puglia. Count Squint-Eye is mainly remembered for his cruelty: he had 12 priests from nearby Narbo executed simply for criticising his rule.

He was also a stickler for strict adherence to the 'droit de seigneur', which obliged every bride to spend her wedding night with him.

*Conversanesi* have been known as the 'Sons of the Count' ever since.

*The little road to Polignano a Mare runs between villas and olive groves to the coast*

of Acquaviva who resided here until 1806 when the decree of Giuseppe Bonaparte led to the abolition of feudal power in Puglia. Giangirolamo II (1626-1665) known as the 'Squint-Eyed' Count, was an important patron of the arts. He sponsored Paolo Finoglio, whose cycle of paintings 'Jerusalem Delivered' can be seen in the castle museum. Finoglio also painted the frescoes in the Church of Saints Cosma and Damiano on the opposite side of the old town from the castle. They are prized amongst

The little road to Polignano a Mare runs straight as a die between villas and olive groves down to the coast. Polignano is remarkable for its cliffs and caves. The coast-line here is relatively flat, distinguished only by the extraordinary colour of the water. First stop is the life-size bronze of singer Domenico Modugno on the cliff-top esplanade to the north of the pretty pebble beach. There is an excellent view from here of the bright white buildings of the old town clustered along the headland to



the south with the intense blue of the Adriatic stretching off to the horizon. Domenico, who was born here in 1928, became an international star with his famous hit *Nel blu dipinto di blu*, better known as *Volare*. The song remains popular – Virgin Airlines recently used the Dean Martin version for their TV commercial. Puglia's most famous modern artist, sculptor Pino Pascali, was also born here in 1935. There is a Museum of Modern Art on Parco del Lauro dedicated to him. Famous for its dramatic location, Cala Paura Beach is in an almost circular bay hemmed in by cliffs. It's a great spot for a swim or a little sun-bathing. The beach is approached through gardens down a ravine which passes under the main road. There is another great view from the bridge. There are pleasant bars and restaurants on the little Piazza dell'Orologio in the old town. Leave time to visit Mario Campanella's 'Super Mago del Gelo' on Piazza Garibaldi in the more modern part of town. Established 1935, a venerable institution serving heavenly ice-creams as well as fancy coffees, crushed ice drinks and liqueurs. **R**

## GETTING THERE

### ► BY PLANE

Bari airport is only about 40km from Conversano. There are direct flights to Bari from Dublin, Gatwick and Stansted. (Brindisi, to the south, is a little farther away, but also has connections to Gatwick and Stansted.)

### ► BY TRAIN

From Bari airport, take the shuttle train to Bari Central, then take a train towards Martina Franca (Ferrovie del Sud-Est) and get out at Conversano.

### ► BY CAR

From the airport, take the SS16 towards Brindisi, and leave the motorway at the Cozze/Conversano exit. Then take the SP121 to Conversano.



## DON'T MISS

### THE MADONNA DELLA FONTE

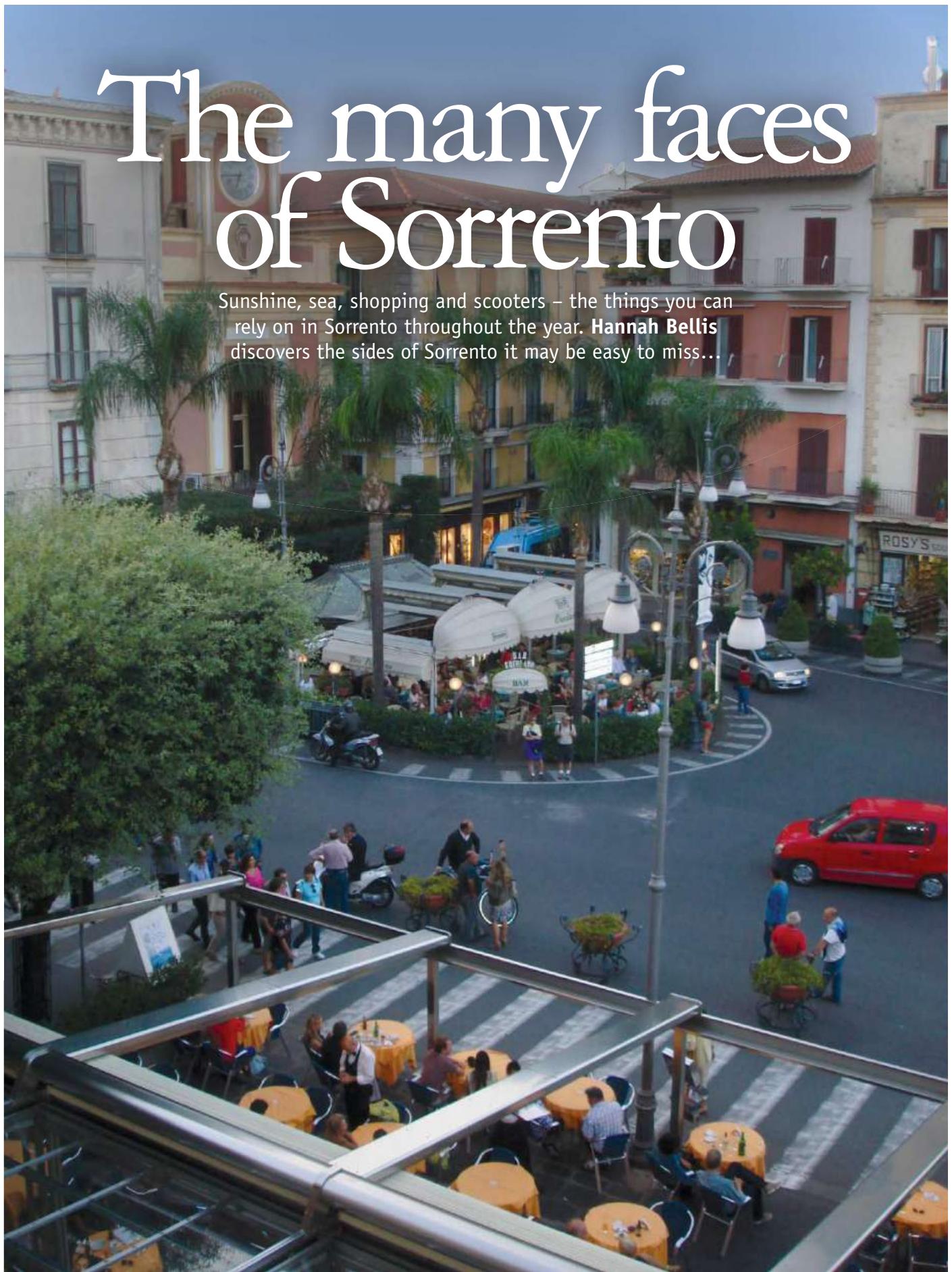
If you are in Conversano on the third Sunday of May you will see the procession of the Madonna della Fonte, a Byzantine icon that is considered to be the protector of the town. The procession is combined with a spectacular festival of music and fireworks.

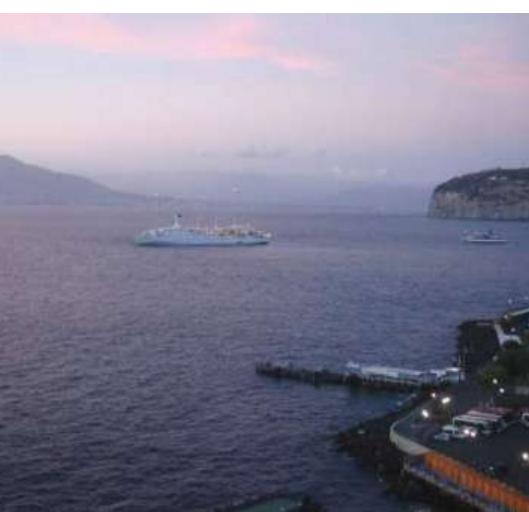
## The Piazza Conciliazione



# The many faces of Sorrento

Sunshine, sea, shopping and scooters – the things you can rely on in Sorrento throughout the year. **Hannah Bellis** discovers the sides of Sorrento it may be easy to miss...





*Here is the heart of the city, tabled terraces, mopeds aplenty and long walkways of grey swirled paving with decorative shapes like tidemarks on a beach*

W<sup>hatever</sup> time of year you visit Sorrento, it always seems to be sunny, from the cheerful yellow façade of the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in bustling Piazza Tasso to the equally bustling sun-dappled shopping streets around Via Cesareo. Perhaps this is what makes the place feel sunny – it is frequently bustling but never hurried. The beautiful sea vistas and pedestrianisation of the centre that bans cars from 7pm brings things back to a holiday pace of life. The crowds can fill the roads with no cars to worry about. The trees are full of citrus fruit and the terraces awash with holidaymakers enjoying a drink or a coffee and watching the world go by.

Any visitor will find this place charming – it exists as a holiday destination. On a map, it looks like two triangles joined by points at Via Capo, so in reality it has six sides. It is certainly a city of different moods, all of them a treat.

*Clockwise from far left: Dusk in Piazza Tasso; Hannah tastes a tiny lemon sorbet; wonderfully tatty Marina Grande; Vesuvius backs sunset views; produce on Via Cesareo*

I began as most visitors do at the Piazza Tasso of the *centro storico*, named after the 16th-century poet Torquato Tasso, who was born in Sorrento. Most famous as the author the poem *Jerusalem Delivered*, he suffered from mental illness and died a few days before he was due to be crowned King of the Poets by the Pope. The square is a fitting monument celebrating the city's most famous son – you'll find a statue of him in its northeast corner.

When I visited, a Dalí festival was on and the square full of surrealist sculpture alongside his statue, vibrant and thought-provoking amid the crowds, like the poetry of the man himself. Here is the geographical heart of the city, tabled terraces, mopeds aplenty, and long walkways of clean grey swirled paving with decorative white shapes like tidemarks on a beach.

Venture towards the sea to find the small but calm green space of the Villa Comunale park, overlooking the Bay of Naples and Vesuvius. It's another square of ➤



*Fishing nets hang like bunting between the ornate street lights and fishermen mend their nets alongside sleeping stray cats curled up in the boats*

► statues; leafy and green this time with street musicians and strollers replacing the tables, though you can enjoy a drink at the Bar Villa Comunale as you take in the view. Or else continue along the Via Marina Grande to enjoy the scenery as the sea drops away from you down towards the port.

Marina Grande itself is another face of the city. Descending from

*Clockwise from top left: Limoncello bottles; decorations at Giardini di Cataldo; the yellow church of Santa Maria del Carmine; fishing net bunting at Marina Grande; shopping on Via Cesareo; day time view across the Bay of Naples*

the cliffs above you lose some of the otherwise ubiquitous sunshine as you are sheltered by the rocks around you. A little grotto of our Lady of Lourdes is carved into the rocks as you descend and statues and fountains grace the damp stone walls. In the marina you are enclosed by grey stone and coloured houses at your back, and the beautiful water of the cove in front. It is charmingly dilapidated. Fishing nets hang like bunting between the ornate street lights – this was the main port of Sorrento when it was still a small fishing village and fishermen still mend their nets alongside sleeping stray cats curled up in the boats. Because of the steep decent, and the peeling paint, this is a world away from the busy, sunny streets above, but still just as alluring. You can see it captured in celluloid alongside equally alluring Sophia Loren in the 1950s film *Scandal in Sorrento*. Dining here is cheaper than in the main tourist area of town, plus you are in the right spot to get the freshest catch of the day!





## THINGS YOU'LL FIND IT HARD TO DO IN SORRENTO

### ► SWIM

The sea is all around you, and looks fabulous sparkling in the sun. But it's not easy to get to the water as you are so far above it, and when you do, it's expensive to swim. There is very little beach to speak of anywhere in the city – the best is the pebbles at Marina Grande, and you can swim from pontoons erected beneath Villa Comunale. You will have to pay for the privilege though, around €25, which includes use of a sun longer, so if you are going to take to the water, plan to make it worth your while.

### ► EXPERIENCE CRIME

Of course, there are pickpockets in Sorrento, just as there are along the whole of the coast, but it is far less of a problem here than it is in Naples. Tourism is what fuels the whole economy of the place, so petty tourist crime is not tolerated. It's not a reason to throw caution to the wind, but this is a relatively safe city, with very little serious crime and, with the evening pedestrianization, walking around is much safer here too.

### ► RELY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The trains and bus network is good, and services cover a wide area. But don't expect them to be reliable or to stick to any published timetable – they are very unlikely to! The services are often very crowded too. Public transport will serve you well only if you are in full-on laid-back holiday mode with no deadline to worry about. Sadly you are not going to be able to avoid stress by hiring a car, as the drivers here have all the disregard for the rules of the road of their Neapolitan neighbours.

### ► LOSE WEIGHT

The local limoncello is essentially sugar and alcohol flavoured with lemon. It's fantastic on a hot day, but far from slimming. You can also find Crema di Limoncello too, with added cream, but I'd avoid this – and not just for the calories, as it is not really Italian. You'll find the amazing Neapolitan *baba* and *sfogliatelle* in abundance here, as well as local dishes like *scialatielli* egg pasta served with seafood. Sorrento can be quite hilly in parts and there is fantastic walking on the coast around the town – but it's not enough.

### ► PRACTISE BEGINNER'S ITALIAN

If you are struggling to communicate, Italians here will speak English to you. They are trying to be helpful, and of course they are keen to practise their English too. At times it seems almost impossible to practise beginner's Italian here as the locals are so used to foreign visitors.

## WHERE TO STAY

### ► PALAZZO JANNUZZI RELAIS

Piazza Torquato Tasso, 1

✉ +39 081 877 2862

[www.palazzojannuzzi.com](http://www.palazzojannuzzi.com)

The Jannuzzi family have run the decorative art and craft store on this site for more than 100 years. The floors above, with spectacular views over Piazza Tasso, was a family residence, but they have now been updated and converted into a lovely design hotel. Black, yellow and white dominate the décor for a sunny finish with a stylish edge, and I've rarely had a warmer welcome from staff, with a fabulous breakfast on the hotel's roof terrace. Great location with a modern luxury finish. Double rooms with breakfast from €139.

## WHERE TO EAT

### ► CAMERA & CUCINA

Via Correale, 19

✉ +39 081 877 3530

[www.facebook.com/CameraECucina](http://www.facebook.com/CameraECucina)

This stripped down eatery, bar and shop doesn't have a standard menu – dishes change every night, depending on what is in season in the restaurant's kitchen garden. Menus are written up on the large blackboard next to the kitchen. After dinner you can adjourn to the courtyard.

Price range  

### ► IL BUCO

2a Rampa Marina Piccola, 5

Piazza Sant'Antonino

✉ +39 081 878 2354

[www.ilbucoristorante.it](http://www.ilbucoristorante.it)

For Michelin-style dining in Sorrento, this is the place. Far from being 'a hole', the restaurant is all white linen and sparkling cutlery beneath the brick archway colonnades of the cellars of an old convent. The food is traditional Italian, served exquisitely, and with a touch of theatre – I had *scialatielli* topped with fish sliced so finely that the heat of the pasta below made it undulate like a jellyfish.

Price range   

### ► DI LEVA

Via Marina Grande, 31

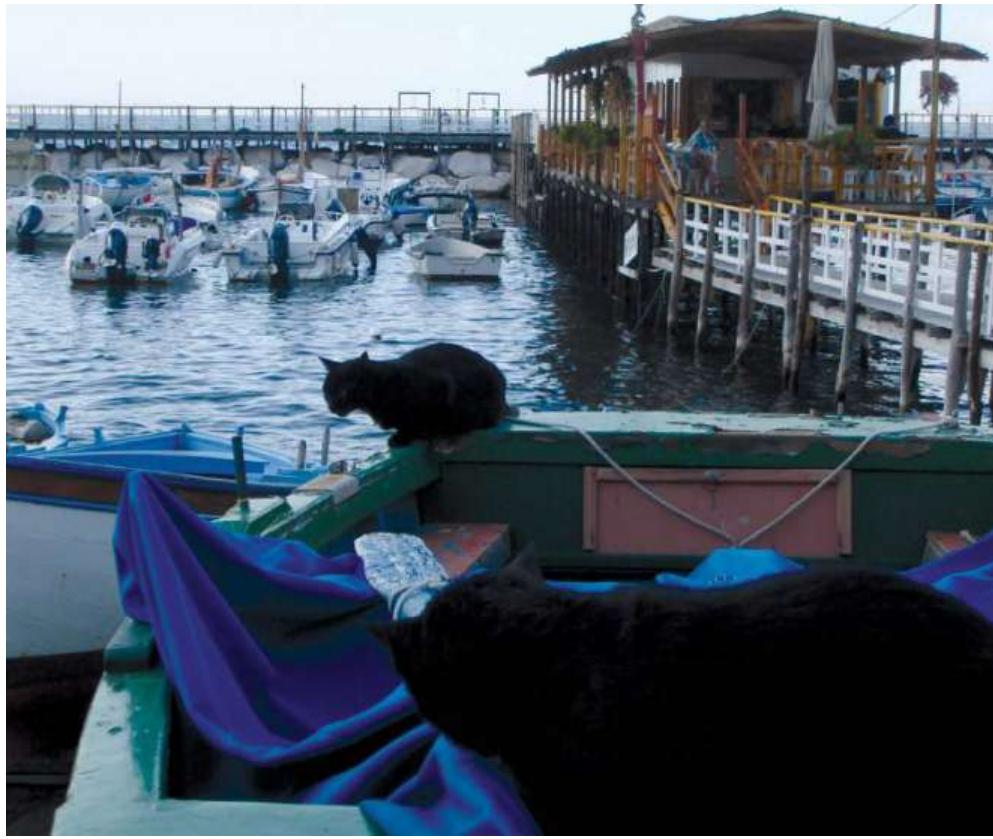
✉ +39 081 878 3826

[www.ristoratedileva.com](http://www.ristorantedileva.com)

For fresh fish and pasta, simply served, this trattoria is one of the best options in Sorrento. Set by the water's edge on pretty but tatty Marina Grande, it's a great place to sit and watch the light fade to dusk over the water if you prefer not to eat – though once you are here, the tasty aromas from other diners' plates may well make you change your mind.

Price range 





*This is the authentic Sorrento experience today – the fishing village is long gone.*

*But you can still find a slice of it tucked away in the Marina Grande*



► Back in the *centro storico*, you can leave the open space and sea views of Piazza Tasso and the Corso Italia and enter the narrow cream streets around Via Cesareo. The shopping and eating here is very appealing – lots of tourist shops interspersed with produce, clothing and jewellery stores, bars and restaurants. In some ways it is a touristy area, but look upwards – you will spot traditional Sorrento balconies, decorated in drying fruit and squash. There are still a good 15,000 inhabitants in Sorrento, and they often live right above the tourist hubbub.

Today the tiny fishing village of Sorrento has evolved into a prosperous town of 15 churches, which exists because of its many charms and its huge appeal to visitors. Most of the voices you hear in the street will be speaking English, or German, or even Chinese – the Italian language is not heard so often. But the welcome you receive and the safe friendly streets of the city more than make up for this. This is the authentic Sorrento

*Clockwise from far left: Cloister of San Francesco; scooters line the decorated paving by day; cats in the fishing boats at Marina Grande; a stylish kiosk in Piazza Tasso; grotto of our Lady of Lourdes on the steps to the Marina Grande; a babà embellished with lemon cream*

experience today – the fishing village is long gone. But you can still find a little slice of it tucked away in the Marina Grande. It's impossible not to be charmed by this small city with its many faces – and amazingly you can discover them all on foot within a couple of hours. But you'll want to spend a lot longer here than that. ®



# ITALIA!

## ICONS

The Roman Empire, it seems, was built primarily to glorify its leaders, and the gladiator was the symbol of this glory, brought to Rome for the entertainment of its citizens.



### THE ROMAN GLADIATOR

Gladatorial combat has featured on our screens – big and small – but how closely does our modern-day interpretation of the Roman gladiator fit the truth?

My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions and loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next.”

Russell Crowe's speech in the 2000 film by Ridley Scott was stirring stuff. But how close to the real thing was Crowe's reprise in his role as a Roman gladiator?

Although hard to pin down exactly, gladiatorial fights (the name originating from the word *gladius*, which means sword) date to around 300 BC. During the rise of the Roman Republic they became hugely important in terms of politics as well as entertainment, the combatants being a combination of volunteers looking to increase their social standing and slaves and criminals. Fights were indeed to the death, and exotic animals were imported from Africa – lions, especially. The levels of cost and extravagance were extraordinary – in 65 BC Julius Caesar ran games in honour of his father that included up to 320 pairs of gladiators in silver armour. So it looks like Ridley Scott's dramatisation wasn't too far off the mark. 



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